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"NOW AND FOREVER?" HE PERSISTED. WITH THE END OF HER SUNSHADE SHE TRACED IN THE SAND THE WORDS, "NOW AND FOREVER."

Now and Forever; or, Why Did She Marry Him?

BY HENRIETTA THACKERAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE RISING OF THE TIDE.

A DELICIOUS early summer morn, Nature so bright and fresh that she appears to have been but just turned out from the mint of "the great

Architect," spick-and-span new, instead of bearing within her breast the darkness and storm, the misery and sin of centuries.

The sun, making the overhanging firmament "a roof fretted with golden fire," is already at his alchemic work of transmuting all he touches into gold, and tinges with his rays the green waves which have left the immensity and grandeur of ocean to see how land looks on this rosy morn, and roll over each other on the yellow sands, as boys, released from school, play leap-frog over each other's backs.

In spite of the beauty of the morn, the dwellers in the little seaport town of Wemlake-super-Mare seem to prefer encountering the god of day behind bulwarks of curtain and shutter rather than to meet him in the

open, for only two persons are to be seen upon the beach. One is a woman of medium height, of so lithesome and perfect a form that of it might be said, as of the works of Phidias, not in a single line does it offend against the laws of beauty.

She is dressed in a loose white wrapper, with long hanging sleeves, the whole bordered with a black edging of the classical form known as key-pattern. Her golden hair falls in loose masses adown her shoulders, pearly by the crops of spray which still cling to it from her morning bath. Her mouth, though the lips are rather too thin, is shaped like a Cupid's bow, and in her hand she carries a bouquet of seaweed, which she has gathered upon the beach.

But for the expression of her steel-blue eyes, she would form a fit representative of Aphrodite herself. In them there is a look of greed which one would assign to a Danae thirsting for the gold shower rather than to the goddess of love.

The other matutinal riser is of the sterner sex, and is as good a specimen of a strong, blue-eyed, fair-haired Saxon as one would desire to see. Tall, broad-shouldered, clean-limbed, as those athletes upon whose oil-anointed forms the Roman damsels delighted to gaze in the blood-stained arenas of old, as they fought with the beasts of the field or their fellow beast, man.

The pair recognize each other with a friendly bow, and as the steel-blue eyes of the woman meet the frank blue eyes of the man, the latter seems as irresistibly drawn toward her as is the needle to the lodestone.

"Astir already, Mr. Adair?"

"Yes, Madame Deberle, for I knew that at this hour I should meet you returning from your bath," was the frank reply.

"I had little idea," said madame, smiling and speaking without the slightest foreign accent, "that the prospect of my society would have so beneficial an effect as to prove an incentive to early rising."

"Ah, madame, you do not know what the companionship of a refined woman is to one who has led such a Bohemian life as I have done. I have not a single female relative in the world, and but few male ones."

"I think it must be the sympathy of our respective loneliness that has attracted us toward each other, then," observed the lady; "excepting my maid, there is no one I know in England, and in France my few acquaintances care little for, or altogether disown me."

"Through no fault of yours, I am certain."

The words were only simple ones, but there was a depth of feeling in the tones in which Richard Adair spoke them.

"You only do me justice," replied Madame Deberle; "but I thank you, nevertheless, for that justice, and prize it all the more highly on account of its very rarity."

"Cannot I be of service to you in any way?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"No, I thank you. We leave here in a few days; indeed, I only came down in order that my mail, who is a most devoted servant, might visit her friends who reside in these parts, and then—"

"Then what?" asked Richard Adair, as his companion hesitated to finish the sentence.

"Then you and I will probably never meet again, for I return to France," she replied, almost mournfully.

The flood-gates of pity in the young man's heart were opened by her sorrowful tones. Pity carried out its old characteristic of being akin to love, and then and there Richard Adair asked Ellen Deberle to become his wife, and to link her lonely position with his.

It is true that he had been acquainted with her little more than half a dozen days; but he was, as he had said, a Bohemian, and knew naught of the conventionalities of life. He loved this woman, and her looks seemed to tell him that she loved him; he was soon about, as he had already informed her, to sail for Canada, where a distant relation was to take him

into partnership as a doctor, and why should he hesitate to say "I love you; be my wife?"

She, however, felt, or feigned, astonishment at so unexpected—at least, she called it unexpected—an offer; and without saying him yea or nay, insisted upon his hearing the circumstances which had placed her in so isolated a position. They seated themselves upon a smooth piece of rock which emerged from the sands, and with the plashing waves playing a fit accompaniment to her soft voice—for Madame Deberle possessed that most desirable gift in woman—she told him the story of her life. Her parents, English people, having died when she was quite a child, she had been adopted by an uncle living in Paris, whose straitened means had urged her into an early marriage with a man considerably her senior, and a great invalid.

His relations, although they did not oppose the marriage, were far from approving it; and at his death, which took place within a year of their union, closed their doors, as they had hitherto done their hearts, against her.

Her husband's death was soon followed by that of her uncle, and though possessed of a tolerable fortune which her husband had left her, she had few acquaintances, and no friend but her servant, an English girl, for whose pleasure she had come to England.

"That is my story," her lips said, as she concluded; and her eyes added, "I will take you for my husband, if you still wish it."

He did wish it, and with all the fire of his young and ardent heart brimming to his lips, again entreated her to link her fate with his.

She accepted him; and—strange anomaly!—the readiness with which she did so, for a moment shocked the innate sense of delicacy even in his young Bohemian mind.

His love for the beautiful widow, had, however, been a love at first sight, and that is love blinded with a double bandage; and as she rested her head, with its luxuriant wealth of hair scented with the healthful sea-spray, upon his shoulder, the feeling passed away, and there remained but a delicious wonderment that so glorious a goddess should bestow herself upon so humble a mortal.

They talked little of the past, little of the present, but much of the future, arranging that an immediate marriage should take place, so that they might sail to Canada together, and the deposit money, which he had already paid for his passage, not be lost.

His was too independent a nature to live upon his wife's fortune, and for the moment he saw no opening in England for a career; while she, on her side, seemed rather to urge than attempt to deter him from a speedy departure.

"You are sure that you love me?" he asked.

Her looks fell beneath his ardent gaze, and there seemed to lack the genuine ring in the "Yes" of her reply.

"Now and forever?" he persisted.

With the end of the sunshade which she carried she traced in the sand the words, "Now and forever."

It was as though the sun had photographed them as they fell from his lips, not as though they had been traced by her hand, so rapidly was the reply.

The tide, which had been for some time rising, reached almost to their feet, and one wave stretching itself beyond its fellows, ruthlessly obliterated her promise.

CHAPTER II.

DOWN BY THE RIVER SIDE.

In less than a week from the time of Richard Adair's proposal, Ellen Deberle had cast aside her sable habiliments (the dress she wore on that memorable early morning meeting by the sea-side having been merely a loose bathing wrapper) and became his wife, the pair being married by special license.

Then followed a season of intense happiness for the young husband, to whom this was his first true and honorable love.

"The world forgetting, by the world forgot," he desired nothing better than that their lives should flow on thus placidly forever, wandering by the sea-shore, the scene of their brief courtship, or sailing on the tranquil sea, oblivious alike of the future storms of nature and of life.

But no human bliss is quite perfect; and, even at this early period of their honeymoon, Richard Adair felt there was a crumple in his rose-leaf.

After a few—a very few days, his wife seemed to weary of the simple pleasures which so contented him, and to long for a more exciting life.

It astonished him greatly to find that she had ordered from the bookseller's a daily copy of the *Morning Post*, and read with avidity the doings of fashionable people with whom she could have nothing in common.

Their goings out and comings in, the criticisms on a new play or opera bouffe, the appearance of a fresh actor or actress being the only reading in which she cared to indulge.

"You would not surely have me wade through the works of Bacon, Macaulay, or Darwin?" she observed to her husband, when he had been rallying her on her fondness for the fashionable *Post*.

In the midst of the glorious weather that had accompanied their courtship and marriage, and followed on with their honeymoon, came a persistently wet morning, and Mrs. Adair, deprived by it of her sea-bath, was cross and out of spirits.

"Scarcely ten o'clock," she exclaimed, rising from the breakfast-table with a yawn, and looking at her tiny jeweled watch, which, like many other beautiful things, was not very reliable. "How on earth am I to go through the livelong day?"

In a moment her young husband was by her side, looking as greatly concerned as if she had given vent to an exclamation of physical pain; but the kiss which he applied to her lips scarcely sufficed to strangle another yawn that was rising to them.

"You play and sing, my love," he said; "let me hire you a piano for the rest of the time we are here, and get some music from the music-seller's for you to try over?"

"Oh, it's sure to be a wretched old kettle-drum they would let out in such a place as this, and their music old enough to have served for a march for the animals into Noah's Ark," she replied, ungraciously. "Besides," she added, "it's pouring with rain, and you would get wet in going a dozen yards."

"Do you think I am such a carpet knight as to dread a wetting in so fair a mistress's behalf?" Richard asked, with a half amused and a thoroughly loving look in his wife's face.

"What a strange fellow you are to think of nothing but me!" she exclaimed, moved in spite of herself.

"I care for nothing but you," he replied.

She took him by the two hands, and looking at him, said slowly, "Yes, I believe you do really and truly love me."

"With all my heart and soul!" he confirmed.

"And is not my love returned?" he added.

She laughed, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "Of course it is, but I think, husband mine, that you and I have different ideas of love."

The piano came, and during the day the house resounded with the quadrilles of Musard, the waltzes of Gungl, the Lancers of Godfrey, or with the clear, fresh notes of Ellen's voice in the drinking song of "Orphee," or the ecstatic declarations of "La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein" for the military.

Her husband, a passionate lover of music, ventured to ask her for something of Beethoven or Mendelssohn; but she declared that all she knew of these composers was once seeing a dreary opera called "Fidelio," and hearing an interminable sonata played at the "Monday Pops" while she was staying in London, for her life had been little better than that of a chrysalis.

"A chrysalis that longs to emerge into a butterfly," thought her husband; while, with the loving unselfishness of his nature, he inwardly vowed that he would work with might and main in the new country to which they were soon going, so as to surround his butterfly with the flowers of luxury she so loved.

The day following its arrival the piano remained untouched—the young wife had tired already of her toy; but fortunately in the afternoon the weather brightened, and was followed by such a glorious evening as inspired Addison when he wrote:

"Soon as the evening shades prevail
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listening earth
Repeats the story of her birth;
While all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.
Forever singing as they shine,
'The hand that made us is Divine.'"

"Not by the sea; I am tired of the everlasting moaning of the waves," Mrs. Adair exclaimed, as her husband proposed their usual stroll on the beach.

"Only two days since you said their sound was like soothing music, my darling," he said, in astonishment.

"Probably; but in two days things are apt to grow monotonous, and now they seem to say, 'Thus far can we go, and no further.' I can sympathize with their complainings, but I do not care to listen to them; they are too like the voices of human beings."

She said this so wearily, that her husband could but infer she was thinking of herself.

"Ere long you will be on your way to a new world, where you will have fresh scenes to divert your thoughts from the old monotonous life," he said.

"True," she assented, but without a vestige of enthusiasm in her voice.

"Nor need we remain at Wemlake any longer, if you are tired of the place," he pursued.

"True," she again assented; and in tones so like her previous reply, that it seemed to be its echo.

"We will settle that point to-morrow; the pressing question is where shall we go this evening?" said her husband.

"Where he liked, so long as it was away from the sea," Mrs. Adair was quite indifferent.

They turned their steps inland, and the delicious calmness of the evening caused them to prolong their walk until they had reached a river some miles from their abode.

In the middle of this river, which was broad, shallow, and swift, there was a small island, on which grew some weeping willows, and the fancy seized Mrs. Adair that it would be charming to be seated beneath those trees, with the stream swirling around them; "but how should they get there?"

Scarcely was his wife's wish expressed, ere Richard, divesting himself of shoes and stockings, and tucking his trowsers up to his knees, had taken her in his arms, and carried her across the stream to the desired spot.

Either from pride in her young husband's strength, or from pleasure at the fresh proof of his willingness to gratify her every caprice, this act seemed to charm away the depression that had been lingering about her.

Seated on the edge of the island, close to, but almost hidden from, each other by the shadows cast by the overhanging willows, their hands met and clung together with almost painful pressure.

In the distance they could hear but the monotonous chirp of the corncrake; the waters of the river seemed, as they flowed past, to sing a lullaby, and the stars that studded the heavens were but as sentinels, guarding Nature's rest.

"What a pity we did not bring our bathing dresses!" Mrs. Adair exclaimed, after they had been seated some time in silence. "The river is not deep, and I should have been able to go miles if I liked, instead of being confined in a

wretched bathing machine, as one is by the sea. Oh, Richard, how I wish I were a man, and could swim as you do!"

"Let me teach you," he said.

"Will you?—will you?" she cried, enthusiastically—"here, and not in the sea, where I always get nervous, and fear some cruel wave may come and carry me away. In the river, one is safe."

Richard knew that danger lurks in the river as well as the sea, but being an expert swimmer—indeed, he was an adept at all manly sports—had no fear for his wife's safety, and wishing to inspire her with as much confidence as possible, assented to her observation.

"To-morrow evening," said he, "we will bring our bathing things with us."

They dallied by the river, seated side by side, and hand in hand, watching its flow, until Mrs. Adair declared that their island was a boat, and that it, and not the river, was moving.

Then her husband expressed it as his belief that she had the vertigo, and again taking her in his arms, bore her back to the mainland.

The next evening the promised lesson was given; and with the freshness of the pleasure, Mrs. Adair seemed to put on a new character, entering the river laughing and gay as a child, and splashing the water over her husband.

They commenced the swimming lesson, and so long as her young husband supported her by holding the waistband of her bathing dress with one hand, and passing his other round her waist, Mrs. Adair felt so sure of her powers, that she insisted upon being left to her own resources.

Then began a helpless struggle on the part of the pupil, who with extended hands wildly beating the water, was fain to seek support from her teacher, and to repose, exhausted and dripping, in his arms.

At the end of a month, such was the pleasure she took in this new pastime, and such her aptitude for learning, that Mrs. Adair could swim tolerably well.

It was the time of full moon, and slowly swimming with the tide, the young couple delighted to watch the gleams of light, which, taking advantage of the openings made in the foliage-laden trees by the summer breeze, would dash through and glide along the borders of the river like soft white attendant phantoms; to note the calm water, which, smooth as a mirror before them, ruffled at their approach, and then broke up into the semblance of a silver woven tissue; or to mark the tiny rings which sprung from their strokes gradually enlarge and lose themselves in the shadow beneath the hanging branches of the willows.

Then, on their return, there was the delight of feeling the current beat against their chests; and they would immerse themselves until the water was on a level with their lips, and passed over their shoulders, their whole bodies seemingly embraced in one cool, long kiss; and when Mrs. Adair quitted the water, overcome with that delicious fatigue of the limbs, but that freshness of the skin, which aquatic exercise produces, she would lie upon the green sward, content to watch the swimming feats of her husband, for in nothing did she take more delight than in the exhibition of physical strength.

For a time, at least, the crumple seemed to have been smoothed out of the roseate life of Richard Adair.

CHAPTER III.

MY LADY'S MAID.

A DESCRIPTION of the Adairs' wedded life would not be complete without the introduction of Susannah Greig, my lady's maid—declared by her mistress to have been a treasure to her, alike as child, wife and widow.

Judging by her looks, one would not have credited Susannah with any remarkable amount of affection; and her manner was as cold to her new master as the hand which he took in his when he thanked her for her faith-

ful services to his wife, and asked her to remain with and accompany them to Canada.

But to Mrs. Adair even these cold hands were but additional virtues. She was subject to violent headaches, which could only be got rid of by the chill palms of Susannah being pressed upon her forehead.

Dressed herself with almost Puritan simplicity, no fashionable lady's maid ever took more pains with her mistress's toilet than did Susannah.

"You shall see how she can dress me," Mrs. Adair said to her husband, when one day, owing to their having made an excursion into the neighboring town, their usual early dinner was to be changed for a late one.

An arrangement not easily made, for the orthodox dinner-time of Wemlake-super-Mare was one o'clock, and it had taken all the persuasive powers of her lodgers, and the cold, insistent tones of Susannah, to convince the astonished landlady that it was a regular dinner, and not a meat tea, they required at seven.

A high tea, consisting of a dish of ham, a fresh-boiled lobster, or, *in extremis*, a chump chop and a dish of hot buttered scones to follow, she could comprehend; but to consume salmon cutlets, roast lamb, asparagus, and cherry tart, so near to bedtime, was, in her opinion, courting indigestion, upsetting the kitchen arrangements, and flying in the face of Providence.

"Mind, Richard, you go straight from your dressing-room down to dinner," enjoined Mrs. Adair, as, on their return from their excursions, she went into her bedroom, taking Susannah with her.

Richard's toilet consisted of simply washing his hands and face, and brushing his hair; consequently, he was ready before the appointed dinner-hour; but it was eight, instead of seven o'clock, ere his wife issued from the hands of her tire-woman, and put in an appearance at the table.

According to her instructions, the blinds had been drawn down, and such a number of candles lit, that the astonished landlady began to think her lodgers had gone clean daft.

After he had waited some time for his wife, Richard Adair had opened one of the windows, and, simultaneously with her entry, the first moon-ray peered cautiously into the room; but, fearing the too strong rivalry of the artificial light, ventured no further than the geraniums on the window-sill, upon whose scarlet blossoms it rested, gratefully crowning them with a silvery halo.

Gazing out upon the sea, and thinking of his happiness, Richard had not noted the flight of time, and on hearing the door open, he turned, and could scarcely believe it was his wife who stood before him. Not only was her usual style of dress and the arrangement of her hair completely altered, but the sudden entry from the dark staircase into the brilliantly-lighted room seemed to daze, and give her the hesitating appearance peculiar to short-sighted people.

Her dress, of the palest green satin, had a train of inordinate length, from the bottom of which sprang a spray of ivy, interspersed with bunches of violets, which twined round her entire form, the corsage being bordered with a deep wreath of similar foliage, from which her perfect bust seemed to emerge like that of some forest nymph from the ivy-clustered trunk of an enchanted oak.

From her hair, which she wore strained back from the forehead, and twisted in classic coils at the back of her well-shaped head, fell another spray of ivy, encircling her neck, and terminating in a bunch of violets, which lay upon her satin skin as might the offering of a devotee upon a marble shrine.

At seeing the surprise depicted upon her husband's face, she clapped her hands in childish glee, and told him that she had indulged in this freak to show him that she could, in spite of her small knowledge of the world, play the part of a grand lady should occasion require.

her to do so; and that, as regarded the expense, she could well afford it, for owing to her having been until her marriage in mourning, she had spent but little in dress. In spite, however, of her gayety and the champagne which they had brought with them from the neighboring town, the dinner was not the success Mrs. Adair had intended it to be.

Her husband, sitting opposite to her in his ordinary morning coat, felt out of place. The viands had been kept waiting so long that they were cold; while the champagne, getting mixed in the landlady's brains with a previous lodger's claret, had been put near the fire to warm; and Susannah, whom Mrs. Adair had requested to wait at table, seemed to disapprove of the whole proceeding, and was unusually frigid. Neither did the information that the bracelet his wife wore was a present from her late husband tend to improve matters, for Richard Adair hated to think that his darling had ever belonged to another man; and if the snake upon her wrist had been as fatal as the asp which coiled around the arm of Cleopatra, he could not have felt a greater longing to tear it from her and crush it beneath his feet.

For the first time in his life, Richard Adair understood to what lengths jealousy might drive its victims.

Reflecting, however, that it was for his pleasure as much as for her own that his wife had devised this surprise, he strove to overcome this feeling, and share her gayety; but somehow the conversation flagged. Susannah, who had so far entered into the spirit of the arrangement as to call her mistress "my lady"—a proceeding, by the way, which Mrs. Adair, instead of appreciating, frowned upon—looked flagged, even before the newly-lit candles approached their sockets.

"A fiasco!" Mrs. Adair exclaimed, petulantly, as she rose from her seat; and in so doing swept from the table a specimen glass containing a cream-colored rose, which Richard had placed beside her plate. "We are not used to finery, and my dress seems to weigh as heavily upon me as though it were made of lead. Come, Susannah, and let us get it off."

Followed by her maid, she left the room, and on entering her bedchamber threw herself into an easy-chair in front of her toilet-glass, in which she surveyed herself for some few minutes in silence, while Susannah prepared her night-apparel.

"What do you think of my husband?" she abruptly asked the woman.

"There can only be one opinion, 'my lady,' about Mr. Adair—that he is a kind and amiable gentleman," replied the maid.

"I was not thinking of his qualities, but his looks."

"Mr. Adair is very handsome, my lady."

"Handsome enough, Susannah, for a woman to resign position and fortune for—to live in poverty with, as well as in prosperity?"

"My opinion is not that of your ladyship, who has already vowed these things," said Susannah.

"No?"

"No; to my thinking, no man is good enough or handsome enough to warrant such sacrifices."

Mrs. Adair wheeled her chair round suddenly, and looked steadily at her maid.

"Did you ever have a lover, Susannah?" she asked.

"I, my lady—I?" asked the woman, in astonishment, as though such a question were almost too monstrous for her to have heard it aright, although at the same time her pale face flamed.

"But surely you don't always intend to remain with me? Surely you have some plan in life, and will one day marry, and have a house of your own?" persisted her mistress.

"Have I ever shown any such desire since I have been with your ladyship?" asked Susannah, in her coldest tones.

"Susannah, you are particularly uninteresting to-night," observed Mrs. Adair, turning her chair round in its former position. "There,

uncoil my hair, and let me get out of this world into dreamland as soon as possible."

"Ah, my lady," said Susannah to herself, as she mounted to her attic some half an hour later; "you are right in one respect. I don't intend always remaining with you; and I have a plan in life, although marriage"—she laughed scornfully, as the word passed through her thoughts—"has nothing to do with it, as your ladyship will find out some day."

It was a peculiarity of Susannah's when soliloquizing about her mistress, or when the two were alone together, to think or speak of her as "my lady;" and it will have been noticed that at the dinner-table habit had so far got the better of her that she had thus addressed her before her husband.

"No, no; I am not the devoted fool your ladyship thinks me!" were my lady's maid's last words to herself ere she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

SWEPT AWAY BY THE FLOOD.

THEIR honeymoon was nearly over, and in a few days' time the Adairs were to go to London to make the necessary purchases for their voyage to Canada.

Happily so, too; for while the husband's infatuation for his wife was greater than ever, her propensity for yawning, and showing similar signs of weariness, seemed to daily increase.

The piano was silent, the river-bathing abandoned, and the sea-bath taken as a matter of health rather than of pleasure.

The only occupation Mrs. Adair seemed to care for was, when alone, or in company of her maid, to pour out on to her toilet-table the contents of her jewel-case, and to gloat over them, as a miser gloats over his hoards.

They were jewels more fit for a peeress than the wife of a doctor, who had his foot still on the lowest rung of the ladder of life.

"I know," she declared, one day, to Susannah, "that the fit will be too strong for me, and I shall put them all on; even if it be for no better person's edification than the landlady's."

It was only the coldness of Susannah's tones, which seemed to have the same effect upon Mrs. Adair's actions as did her hands upon Mrs. Adair's head, that restrained my lady from doing aught so foolish.

Half her enjoyment of their beauty, as of her other belongings, not omitting even her husband, was gone, if there was no one to see, admire, and envy.

On just such another morning as that when Richard Adair had asked Ellen Deberle to become his wife, the young man, on returning from his sea-bath, found the breakfast-things laid, but no wife awaiting him.

Thinking she might still be in her bedroom, he went up-stairs to summon her. She was not there, and the room had a curiously empty appearance.

At first he could not realize wherein this emptiness lay, but gradually he noted how his wife's dressing-gown no longer hung upon its accustomed peg; how the few jewels she was in the habit of wearing no longer strewed the toilet-table; how her ivory-backed brushes and hand-glass had disappeared; how her satin slippers no longer lay beside her easy-chair; and that the many trifles a pretty woman scatters about her apartment, imparting to it, however poorly furnished, a certain air of refinement, had been removed.

It had been his room prior to his marriage, and, involuntarily, the story of Cinderella came to his mind.

Had he been staying there too long, and the place, which had put on brightness, as if by enchantment, returned to its original plainness and poverty?

Opposite to the door by which he had entered stood an old-fashioned mahogany wardrobe, of huge dimensions, in which Susannah had been in the habit of arranging her mistress's dresses, and which she had delighted to keep bright and shining.

He opened it, and a chill struck to his heart. It was empty. He managed, however, to conquer this feeling by trying to convince himself that his wife, in one of those freaks of restlessness to which he was growing accustomed, had taken it into her head to change their apartment.

Susannah's room was just over that of her master and mistress's. She would, no doubt, confirm him in this surmise. He went up to it, and after repeated knockings receiving no reply, turned the handle, and looked in.

The bed was made, the room tidied up, but not a vestige of apparel, or of those nicknacks which even the most puritan of women indulge in, was visible.

In hasty agitation, he rung the bell for the landlady.

She had seen or heard nothing of the family since Mr. Adair had gone out for his morning bath, more than two hours since. But, then, she had been busy in the back of the house, and Mrs. Adair and her maid might have gone in and out a dozen times without her knowing it; but she would question Sally.

Sally, the maid of all work, who possessed a face ruddy as a love-apple, and with about as much expression in it, at first declared that she had seen or heard nothing; but on being urged to be a good girl, and think again, and promised a piece of silver in return for so unusual a mental exertion, she contrived to remember that she had noticed the sound of cab-wheels, but had put it down to new lodgers arriving next door.

With a puzzled rather than an alarmed feeling, Richard returned to the breakfast-room, where, on a closer examination, he discovered the landlady's book, which Mrs. Adair had the night before requested might be made up, and, inside it, a Bank of England note, being some few shillings more than the amount of their account.

The matter was growing more mysterious, and Richard's next course was to hurry to the railway station, where stood the one fly—so called, apparently, from its crawling propensities—the village boasted.

He was on their track now.

John had driven the lady and her maid, together with a power of luggage, to the station at the neighboring town, where they had taken, he believed, tickets for London.

He had noticed that during the journey they had kept the blinds of the cab drawn down.

Even as the cabman was speaking, the train from the town in question was signaled, and Richard, without waiting to go round by the gate, vaulted over the fence which separated the road from the railway platform.

Looking down the line, he could see, in the distance, the train advancing at full speed, the front of its engine decorated, in honor of it being Bank Holiday, with boughs of honey suckle and wild roses, looking like some bride maid on her way to a wedding of Leviathans.

Its speed relaxed as it neared the station; but as it came to the platform it did not stop altogether; doubtless the impetus had been too great, or the break had not been soon enough applied.

Richard noticed that the blinds of one of the carriages were pulled down, and remembering what the cabman had told him, he, without waiting for the train to stop, caught hold of the handle of the door, running along the platform with it, in spite of the cries of the guard.

"Stand back! stand back! The train does not stop here!" was called out to him.

But at that moment he saw a piece of a woman's dress, which had been accidentally caught in it, protruding from the door.

It was of black silk, dotted with small gold spots.

He recognized it as belonging to his wife, and dashing his fist through the thick plate glass, tore aside the curtain, and forced down the window.

There sat his wife, pale, almost fainting, but restraining herself, by a supreme effort, from

uttering a cry; there sat Susannah, her knitting needles in her hand, calm and frigid, as he had often seen her doing her work by the sea-shore.

There are some frightful dreams, in which every thing seems to take the form of a phantom, while the dreamer feels paralyzed in all his senses but that of vision.

Such an atmosphere seemed to envelop Richard Adair. He tried to speak, but the words would not come to his lips. He tried to climb into the carriage through the shattered window, but his legs, usually so strong and muscular, refused to obey their owner; and his hands, cut and bleeding, became limp, and loosened their hold.

Loosened it only just in time; for the train was increasing its speed, and in another moment would have passed the platform, and dashed him against the iron rails.

As it was, he fortunately fell upon the platform.

Regaining his feet, he watched the rapidly-retreating train plunge into the gloom of a neighboring tunnel. At the same moment a storm, which had for some time been gathering, burst, and a flash of lightning was followed by a peal of thunder.

She had come to him in calm and sunshine, and had disappeared in storm and darkness.

Staggering, lost, feeling that his wife—his wife whom he had so loved—had not stretched forth a hand to save him from impending death, and was now fleeing from him, he scarcely noted that the large rain-drops were falling upon his burning forehead; and when the officials demanded explanation of his rash conduct, he could do no more than articulate, "Gone—gone!"

She had chosen well her time, when the myriads of holiday-makers made it little short of an impossibility to track any individual traveler.

There was, in those days, no telegraph at the important station of Wemlake-super-Mare, nor at that of the adjoining town, and the next train would not pass through to London until the one which contained Mrs. Adair and her maid had reached its destination.

The young husband followed his runaway wife to town, and for days and weeks sought her, but sought in vain. She had plunged into the flood of human life ever flowing through the modern Babylon, and had disappeared in its waves as completely as though they had been the waves of an angry sea.

CHAPTER V.

SEVEN YEARS AFTER.

"My dear boy, she is yours; and although when you carry her away I shall miss her terribly, yet, as I cannot expect to be allowed to watch over her many years more, I should be selfish indeed were I to refuse her to one whom I sincerely believe will be to her a true and loving protector."

"Oh, Doctor Prendergast, how can I sufficiently thank you for your confidence in me?"

"By making my girl as happy as she deserves to be. She has never known a mother's care, but a better or more affectionate heart does not breathe."

"Of that I am sure, sir. It is now some months since I first met your daughter; and the more I have seen her, the more I have learned, not only to love, but also to esteem her."

"It is because I believe your love to be that of a firm and true man that I so fearlessly place May's happiness in your hands. I feel sure that you are not of those who take a wife as readily as they do a cold."

The above conversation occurred in the consulting-room of Doctor Prendergast, the elder of the two speakers, a medical practitioner in the town of Rockenhurst, and a good specimen of the courteous, open-hearted, old-fashioned country doctor.

At his last remark the younger man flushed, and seemed confused, but recovering himself with some little effort, changed the conver-

sation by reminding the doctor of a promise he had made to take his daughter's suitor over Oaklands, the show-house of the neighborhood.

"No time like the present," was the reply. "I am quite at leisure this afternoon; and, if May returns from her aunt's before we are back, love's instinct, or the servant's directions will tell her where we are to be found."

On their way to Oaklands, Doctor Prendergast informed his companion that this estate was held in trust by Lady Ethel Vivian for her son, a boy of some six years of age; and that her ladyship, who was of a very restless and excitable disposition, was at that time traveling on the Continent.

"She will, however, soon be home, I hear," continued the doctor, "when you will have the pleasure of being introduced to her."

"I shall be introduced to her?" exclaimed the other, in astonishment.

"Yes; for, as soon as she hears of my daughter's engagement, she is sure to allow me no peace until I have shown her what sort of a wolf has broken into my fold, and is about to carry off my one ewe-lamb."

The doctor said this with a smile; but the smile illuminated a tear.

"Lady Vivian and yourself are great friends, then?" asked his companion.

"As great as etiquette allows a titled and rich woman to be with a country doctor. At the time of her husband's death I was able to render Lady Vivian what she considered a great service; although, in fact, it was a very simple one."

"Perhaps her ladyship's estimate of its worth is more correct than your own, Doctor."

"You shall judge for yourself. She had married—report said for money and position—a man much older than herself, who died within a year of the wedding. I had never attended Lord Vivian; but his widow having, for some reason with which I am unacquainted, taken a dislike to the family practitioner, I was sent for, and found her near distraught with grief at—and she made no secret of it—the prospect of losing the estate, which, failing a direct heir, would pass away to a distant relative."

"What made this threatened loss more bitter was the fact of this relative having done his utmost to prevent Lord Vivian's marriage, and from the moment of Lady Ethel's advent having renounced all intimacy with Oaklands."

"I thought you said there was a son," observed the doctor's companion.

"True; but he was not born for some months after the father's death. On the day of the funeral, Lady Vivian—who, to do her justice, had been a thoroughly good wife, and felt her husband's loss keenly, if in a lesser degree than that of his estates—shut herself up in her own room, refusing to see any one but her maid, and taking little, if any food. This maid insisted upon a doctor being called in; and, as I before said, I was sent for. Partly from my own observation, and partly from the maid's statement, I came to the conclusion that disappointment and weariness were the roots of Lady Vivian's disease, and I ordered her to the seaside, without a day's delay."

"And your prescription proved effective?"

"Thoroughly; within three months she returned, cured in health and spirits; and, within ten months of her husband's death, a son was born."

"Surely, Doctor Prendergast, you have ever since recommended the place that possesses such recuperative powers to all your patients who suffer from melancholia?"

"I would do so were it in my power, but when I asked Lady Vivian where she had been staying, she said nowhere in particular, and rattled through such a string of seaside places, that she could scarcely have stopped two consecutive days at any one of them."

"No wonder, doctor, that Lady Vivian has a great friendship for you, since your advice seems to have saved her life."

"Her ladyship declares that I saved her

three; namely, that of her son and the estate, besides her own."

"And she is devotedly attached to her son?"

"Ahem! I am afraid Lady Vivian thinks more of the estate than its possessor; and, really, there is something to be proud of in owning such a property as that!" exclaimed the doctor, enthusiastically, as he pointed with his stick toward a stately mansion and grounds which they were approaching.

"It is a delightful place," assented his companion. "What," he asked, "is the chateau like? 'A lady with such fair domain, surely should herself be fair!'" he quoted, or rather misquoted.

"And she is fair—fair alike in form and feature," replied the doctor, with the emphasis of a connoisseur in female beauty. "I wonder she has never married again," he continued; "for I know that she has had many eligible offers."

"Indeed!"

The younger man put in this ejaculation, as he had most of his observations, more to make the doctor think he was attending to his conversation than because he felt any particular interest in this lady of high degree, who was apparently as different to her who was uppermost in his thoughts, as were the flaunting scarlet poppies in the hedgerows they were passing, to the modest gold and white daisies blooming at his feet.

Having reached the park, and passed up a walk of considerable extent, bordered by the noble trees from which the estate derived its name, the doctor and his companion were received at the hall door by the housekeeper, dressed as the housekeeper of such a mansion with such an approach to it should be dressed—namely, in a gown of rich glossy black silk, and a cap of spotless white blonde and satin ribbon.

The good lady not only showed them over the dark oak-paneled dining-room; the gold-embossed, leather-hung library; the drawing-room, modernly upholstered in blue satin; the morning-room, with its cool, light chintz surroundings; the music and ball-room in the flowered tapestry and milk-white furniture of France of the eighteenth century; the red room, the pink room, the green room, the haunted chamber—for Oaklands, like all other mansions of any celebrity, had its ghost—and my lady's boudoir, but related to them anecdotes of more or less interest, and of more or less authenticity in connection with each, those bearing the stamp of truth being, as a rule, those of least interest.

The picture-gallery she reserved, as a pyrotechnist does the bouquet in his firework display, to the last, as it was worthy of the pride with which its doors were thrown open by her.

There were works innumerable, by artists ancient and modern, including portraits of the house of Vivian by such painters as Holbein, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Millais.

They had arrived nearly at the end of the gallery, when Doctor Prendergast's companion suddenly felt a pair of soft hands placed over his eyes.

Some one had come noiselessly behind him, and, standing on tiptoe, had managed to thus pleasantly blindfold him.

"Guess who it is!" cried the owner of the hands, a fair girl of some eighteen summers, in a voice as bright and fresh as her countenance.

"A pair of gloves against a kiss that I do!" was the reply.

"Substitute unqualified obedience on your part against the kiss on mine, if I lose, and it's a bargain."

"Heads you win, tails I lose—eh? Very well, Miss May Prendergast, be it so," the young man said, laughingly.

"Right. I have lost the wager; and, therefore, claim your obedience. Give me your hand."

"With pleasure; and" (in an aside) "my heart with it."

"Keep your eyes closed, and follow where I lead you," she said, blushing at his words.

"I would follow you blindfolded to the end of the world!" was his gallant reply.

"And I will only avail myself of your blindfold confidence so far as to the end of the picture-gallery, where there is a portrait which I wish you to see suddenly, and to tell me whom you think it resembles."

With these words, Miss Prendergast, having led her follower a few steps, told him to "turn round three times, and catch what likeness he could."

"Great Heaven, it is she!" burst from his lips, as his eyes opened upon the portrait of a lady dressed in white satin, leading by the hand a charming, fair-haired, blue-eyed boy of some five years of age, costumed as a page of the time of Louis XIV.

On the lady's left wrist was a golden serpent, with eyes and fangs of rubies.

"Is not the likeness marvelous? Why, Richard, what is the matter? You are as pale as a ghost!" exclaimed the doctor and his daughter simultaneously.

Well might he, Richard Adair, pale at being thus, without a moment of preparation, made to confront, as it were, the wife he had not seen for seven years—brought face to face with her by the girl he was on the eve of marrying, by the woman he loved better than any other mortal this world contained. For the moment, his agony was almost greater than he could bear.

And she?—the woman who, having discovered his secret, was revenging herself by thus overwhelming him with shame and confusion.

Had the discovery so embittered her as to turn the gentle, loving May Prendergast like unto those with

"Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,
With whom revenge is virtue?"

He withdrew his looks from the fatal picture, hoping that he might be suffering from some delusion, and that when he gazed upon it again the likeness would have passed away.

He dared not look at the girl beside him, but Doctor Prendergast at least, knew nothing; for only concern at his companion's agitation was depicted on his features.

If the portrait were really that of his wife, she who had discovered it must reveal the secret to the good old man; he himself felt that he could not.

"I will play the deceit out to the end now," he thought. "That likeness—whose is it?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper, for his throat seemed to have become suddenly parched.

"Do you not know?" May said, casting a frightened look at him.

"No; I—do—not—know—her," Richard Adair asserted, pronouncing each word slowly, as if it were a sentence, and in a tone of pain, as though it scarred the tongue that uttered it.

"Of course you do not know *her*," rejoined his companion. "She is Lady Vivian. I alluded to the boy's portrait. Papa and I both think he is your very image."

"Yes," assented Doctor Prendergast. "We noticed the likeness you bore to little Lord Vivian the evening when we were first introduced to you at the South Kensington *conversazione*, and he is even more like you in reality than in that picture."

Richard, nerving himself for the effort, again looked at the canvas. Yes, it was the woman who had called herself Ellen Deberle who was gazing at him from it; and in the boy's face he recalled a picture of himself as a child, which used in his father's lifetime, and before their household gods were swept away by that father's death, to hang over the mantle-piece of his own small bedroom.

Some thought of the truth struck him; and, though it was of the truth still veiled in mystery, struck him as might a thunderbolt; and the strong man, the athlete of the river and the cricket-field, who, in rejoicing in his strength, had ever scoffed at the idea of a man swooning, fell to the ground as inanimate, and almost as grand in limb, as the marble figure

of an Apollo Belvedere which stood near. Fell, not at the feet of the living, loving May, but at those of a cold statue of the Venus Aphrodite, which stood on a pedestal placed beneath the picture of Lady Vivian.

CHAPTER VI.

A DAY-WATCH.

In a room, with two large windows partly open, but across which the fresh-looking chintz curtains, patterned with pink coral-tipped honeysuckle, are closely drawn, only just allowing the outside light to filter through them, beside an old-fashioned four-post bedstead, surrounded by curtains of a similar pattern, a young girl is keeping watch, listlessly holding in her hand a book, that she is only making a pretense of reading.

A feeble respiration, scarce so much as a sleeping child would make, alone breaks the silence.

After a few minutes even this sound ceases; and May Prendergast—for it is she who is the watcher—unable to resist a fear that possesses her, gently lifts one of the corners of the bed-curtains.

Her patient is not sleeping, for his eyes, beneath which suffering has drawn lines of blue-black, giving them that apparent increase of hue and size which some women endeavor to obtain by the use of belladonna, are open.

His head rests on one of his arms, which is doubled under it. His hands are thin and white, like the throat from which he has torn away his night-shirt; and his hair, which has grown long during his illness, gives him, in spite of his fair beard, an almost effeminate look.

May, moved to tears by the sight of this attenuated figure, having assured herself that his breathing, although it had become almost inaudible, is still regular, lets fall the curtain, to hide her emotion.

"I am not asleep," the sick man says, in a low voice, but without raising his head or moving an inch of his body, for fear of losing the delicious feeling of lassitude in which he is steeped.

It is the first time that Richard Adair has spoken rationally since he was struck down with brain fever weeks ago in the picture gallery at Oaklands.

He was, at the time of his seizure, on a visit to Doctor Prendergast; and May, who looked upon herself as his future wife, had insisted upon helping to nurse him.

It had pained her at first to hear the name of Ellen so often on his lips during the incoherent ravings of his fevered brain; but she had unbounded faith in him, and, moreover, the name was pronounced with horror rather than love, and did he not tell the owner of it to begone and trouble him no more?

"You are better?" asks May, raising the curtains again, after a few minutes' pause.

"Yes," he answers. "Please give me something to drink."

She goes to a small table, and, crushing some fresh raspberries and ice in a tumbler, holds it to his lips.

He drains the contents; and when she has replaced the glass on the table, motions her to come to him, and, taking her hand, places it on the pillow, resting his hollow cheek upon it.

"Don't move your hand; it is so cool!" he prays in his feeble tones.

"My poor boy, you have suffered terribly!" she says; "but the worst is over now."

"Suffered! Yes; I have slept badly—have had terrible dreams! I would tell them to you if I could."

He shuts his eyes for a moment, and seems trying to recall something to his memory.

"It is all dark!" he murmurs, despairingly. "I have just come from a long voyage, and cannot say where I set out, nor where I have been. I only know I was forever trying to attain something bright that hovered before me, believing that if I did so my sufferings would cease, but some other thing always came between me and it; not any thing dark or

repulsive, but something brighter still—brighter with such a terrible brightness, that oft I could not see that of which I was in search. I must have been a child," he continued, laughing weakly—"a child, crying for the moon, who, instead of seizing the pale, cool crescent, grasps the scathing lightning."

"Richard, you must be calm, or I must go away," May says, alarmed at his excited words.

"Like in the dream—like in the dream; all that was pure and cool fled, and only the scathing lightning remained!" he murmurs.

"Shall I draw back the window-curtains?" she asks, thinking that the freshness and light might dispel her lover's reminiscences.

"No, no; there is too much noise and bustle out there. Look at that!"—nodding toward the shadow of a branch of a tree which grows outside the window, and which the sun photographs on the curtains—"how it moves and twists about, as if it were a living thing! Shut it out, I say!—shut it out!"

He tries to raise himself in the bed, but falls back with the effort.

"I ought not to have talked with you, or to have allowed you to talk to me; and when the doctor comes he will scold me for it, and serve me right, too, for being so bad a nurse," May observes.

"You are wrong," he replies: "the sound of your voice does me good. I am not wonderfully strong yet; but they placed me in a bed of fire, and gave me a brazier for a pillow; and when my feet touched each other, they seemed as though charged with phosphorus, and ignited my legs. I believe I was served like this in order that I might be mended like some broken machine; but then how grand a thing it will be if I come out of it new, and fresh as a child! I will be your child then, dear; and you shall teach me to walk, and no one shall take you from me. Tell me that no one has any claim upon me but you?"

He seizes her arm with the momentary strength of delirium. It is pitiable to see this once strong man cling to this delicate girl.

She manages to pacify him by saying some soothing words.

"Are we alone?—quite alone?" he whispers, after a few minutes' pause.

"Yes, dear. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have something to tell you—something that no one but our two selves must know. Lock the door!"

The girl does as she is bid, and returns to her seat by the bedside.

"What have you to tell me?" she queries.

He appears not to hear her. His brain is again empty, and he closes his eyes wearily.

After a few moments he opens them again, and says, "You love me, May?"

"Yes."

"Very dearly?"

"Yes."

It is the nurse whose voice is now weak and almost inaudible.

"If any thing were to take me from you?"

"I think I should die, too."

"I did not say that I was going to die—I am not going to die!" he asserts; "or where would be the use of my having gone through all that pain in order to be made new? I mean if any thing in this world were to separate us?"

"I still think I should wish to die. But there!" she adds, in her own bright tones; "why should I talk of dying? Let me rather picture the life of happiness that lies before me as your wife."

"Never say that I asked you to be my wife!—never say *that*!" Richard Adair exclaims, excitedly. "I may have told you that I loved you, and I do love you; but never say that I dared to ask you to become my wife!"

"Oh, Richard! those terrible day-dreams are taking possession of you again!" May exclaims, in distressed tones, and mechanically withdrawing her hand.

"Yes, yes; you are right, and they are dreams!" he assents, joyfully. "We shall be

happy, shall we not? Give me back your hand; every thing seems white and pleasant now, and I want to sleep."

May does as he asks her. The patient's excitement vanishes, and he falls into a sound slumber.

CHAPTER VII.

"QUE FAIRE?"

RICHARD'S recovery was slow and unsatisfactory. Sickness had departed from his body, but the doctors declared themselves powerless "to minister to a mind diseased."

When May was with him, he would lie watching her with looks of mingled love and sorrow, turning over in his mind, again and again, the question as to what was best for her happiness that he should do.

On that occasion when he had asked her to lock the door, the impulse was strong upon him to tell her every thing; but, as we have seen, a stupor fell upon him, and the first thoughts of his returning consciousness were the words May had uttered when he hinted at the possibility of their separation: "I think I should die!"

After all, the likeness in the picture to his wife might be but an accidental one.

Yes; certainly before revealing his secret, and making May unutterably miserable, he would find out whether Lady Vivian was in very truth his wife.

Once this plan decided upon, his mind grew comparatively easy and his recovery more rapid.

On inquiring of Doctor Prendergast about Lady Vivian (he could not bring himself to mention her name to May), he learned that she had been to Oaklands during his illness, had grown tired of the place after a week or two's stay, and had returned to her beloved Paris.

No sooner had he regained a little strength, than he asked to be driven to Oaklands, resolving once more to gaze upon that portrait which had brought him so much misery.

He had asked Dr. Prendergast to accompany him, giving as an excuse that he had a desire to see the place where he had been struck down; and the doctor, looking upon this desire as that of an invalid's wayward fancy, the gratifying of which could do no harm, readily agreed.

At the last moment, an important consultation called the doctor away; but in order that his patient, who had of late shown great irritability if thwarted in small matters, might not be disappointed, arranged for his daughter to take his place.

Great was Richard's consternation, on being led down to the carriage, to find May seated in it.

With her usual thoughtfulness, she had brought soft cushions and wraps to make him comfortable; and though the arranging of these gave him some little time to recover himself, he could not altogether disguise the reluctance he felt at the prospect of having to gaze upon that portrait in her company; and, accustomed as May was getting to his wayward ways, it grieved her to the heart to think her presence was distasteful to him. Her pride, however, prevented her from letting him see that she had noticed it.

Before they had reached the park gates, Richard had resolved that he could and would not go with May into the gallery where that picture hung; so, on the plea of the good he felt he was deriving, suggested that they should remain in the open air.

To this she readily agreed, and he was soon once more his own affectionate self, restoring peace to the heart and a smile to the countenance of his companion.

They bade the carriage wait outside, and entered the grounds on foot.

A sea of verdure lay to left, and right, and in front of them—a sea rolling its surge of leaves to the very horizon, without a vestige of brick or stonework, in shape of house or wall, intervening, for the mansion lay in a hollow.

They had not gone many steps ere Richard turned pale, and sunk upon a moss-grown stone seat, which was happily at hand.

The thought had occurred to his weak brain that the mass of greenery might conceal the living original of the portrait, and that she might at any moment emerge from it and confront them.

Well, he had not deserted her; she had left him; and had he been alone, he would have courted such a meeting. But May was there, and for her to learn the truth from other lips than his would be to her worse than death.

His first impulse was to flee from the spot; but he reasoned with himself how childish were his fears, since Lady Vivian was abroad.

Unless he was to live a life of mental torture, he must lose no time in battling against such self-imposed fears.

Managing to regain composure by a supreme effort, he sufficiently concealed his feelings from May to lead her to think that his weakness arose from his recent illness, and she proposed that they should walk on slowly to the house.

"Not to-day, dear; I'm too weak!" Richard replied. "Let us rest awhile here. Oh," he exclaimed, "that it might be forever! Then I should be free from the trouble and sickness of the weary world."

"Shall I summon the Fairy of the Purple Thyme to our aid?" May said, trying to smile, and divert him from his gloomy thoughts, as she picked some sprays from the odoriferous plant, which grew in great abundance around them.

"Who is she?" he asked, mechanically.

"One who protects all true lovers; that is, if the tale that I have heard of her be true."

"Tell it to me," he said.

"What!—a school-girl's fairy-tale?"

"Yes, yes. I like to hear your voice. It soothes me. I want to hear it saying something which flows on and on, like a lullaby. Something which I am not obliged to interrupt, as when we are conversing."

The earnestness with which Richard spoke greatly affected May, and it was tearfully that she complied with his request, and related the following story:

"There was once, upon a high hill, an old, somber castle, which seemed to be composed of nothing but turrets, ramparts, and draw-bridges, hung with chains. Men in armor kept guard night and day upon the battlements, and naught but soldiers found favor in the sight of its owner—the Count Gualtero. If you had only seen the old warrior promenading the long galleries, if you had only heard the sound of his quick and threatening voice, you would have trembled, as did that good and beautiful mademoiselle, his niece, Editha.

"Have you ever noticed a daisy growing amid nettles and brambles open at the first rays of the rising sun? Such was the manner in which this child-girl blossomed into womanhood, amid the rough warriors who surrounded her.

"She lived principally in an outlying tower of the castle, passing her time in embroidering banners, working tapestry hangings, and from the window contemplating the emerald fields and the blue sky.

"From time to time, her stern relative would pay her a ceremonious visit, and then her young heart would urge her to throw her arms around his neck. But a rough word, or a cold look, would stop, and cause her to return, with trembling, to her embroidery. She was like some fair and sweet flower, whose beauty and aroma are disdained.

"One day, Editha was watching the flight of a pair of doves, when she heard a soft, sweet voice, and leaning out of her window beheld a handsome young man, who, with a song upon his lips, begged the hospitality of the castle. The voice seemed to touch her heart, and, without knowing the reason why, tears ran down her cheeks, bedewing a spray of wild thyme which she held in her hand.

"The castle gates remained closed to the

wayfarer, and a sentry cried from the walls, 'Withdraw, boy; there is place here for none save warriors!'

"Editha remained gazing from her casement; and, as she did so, let fall the spray of thyme, which the breeze wafted to the feet of the troubadour, who, raising his eyes and beholding that fair head, kissed the spray and departed, taking it with him, but looking back at every step.

"That night Editha had a dream, in which she seemed to see the spray of thyme, and, issuing slowly from its trembling leaves and flowers, a fairy so wee that she must have been the smallest in all fairyland, with wings of flame, a crown of forget-me-nots, and a green and purple robe.

"'Editha,' she said, in harmonious tones, 'I am the fairy Truelove, and it is I who sent Otho of the Soft Voice to thee. I traverse the earth, gleaning human hearts and bringing them together; I visit the cottage as well as the castle, and it delights me as much to unite the crooks of the shepherd and shepherdess as the scepters of kings and queens; I scatter flowers in the paths of my proteges, and link them together with chains so pleasant that their hearts leap for joy; I inhabit the grass and the flowers of the field in summer, and the embers of the hearth in winter, and wherever I place my foot tenderness and affection spring forth. Sigh no more, Editha, the fairy Truelove has come to relieve your monotonous life.'

"Then the speaker seemed to melt away from the girl's view, and to become incorporated with the spray of thyme.

"When Editha awoke a ray of sunshine illuminated her room; the song of a bird entered from without; and the morning breeze, perfumed with the first kisses he had bestowed upon the opening flowers, covered her fair tresses. She arose, joyous and happy; for she believed what the fairy had told her.

"From time to time during the day she would gaze upon the fair expanse of wood and meadow that lay in the distance before her, smiling at every bird that flew past.

"In the evening she descended to the great hall of the castle, and by the side of Count Gualtero beheld a cavalier, who was amusing her uncle with tales of warriors and battles. She took her distaff in her hand; and, seating herself by the hearth, where the cricket chirped, cast the ivory bobbin deftly to and fro between her white fingers.

"In the midst of her work, having glanced upon the cavalier, she beheld in his coat a spray of purple thyme, and in an instant recognized that he was Otho the Soft-Voiced. With difficulty she repressed the cry of joy that sprung to her lips; and, to hide her embarrassment, bent over the embers, and stirred them with an iron rod.

"The embers crackled, the flames flew upward; and suddenly, in the midst of the gold fire-sparks, appeared the fairy Truelove. Shaking from her robes the fiery particles which sprinkled it, she stepped into the hall, and, unseen by the Count, took the young girl's hand, and led her to the side of the cavalier, saying, 'Love each other, my children.'

"Then she covered them with her wings, and so effectually that the Count, who was relating how the giant Ironhead was decapitated by a terrible thrust from the sword of Swift-and-Sure, his ancestor, did not see Otho deposit the first kiss upon the forehead of the trembling Editha.

"What wonderful wings they were, those wings of the fairy Truelove, transparent as glass and slender as the wings of a gnat; but when the lovers were in danger of being discovered, they grew and grew, and became so thick and impenetrable, that they arrested all glances and stifled all sounds. Then the old Count continued his wondrous and lengthy recital, while Otho embraced the fair Editha under the very beard of the cross-grained suzerain.

"The long story of the Count, however, finished at last, the fairy disappeared among the

flames, and Otho departed, wafting as he did so a last kiss to his beloved Editha.

"Happily again slept the girl that night, dreaming of flowers lighted by stars each more brilliant than the sun.

"When the morning came, she descended to the garden, where she lost herself in the avenues.

"Here she met a young warrior whom she would have passed, but that a spray of thyme in his helmet caught her eye, and caused her to recognize Otho, who had entered the castle in a fresh disguise.

"He made her sit down upon a mossy bank by the side of a fountain.

"The larks were singing in the sky above, the gay butterflies flaunted their rainbow colors in the ambient air, and the grave old oaks nodded their branches to and fro in approval of the lovers' chatter, which lasted so long, that a linnet had time to build herself a nest while it was going on.

"Suddenly the voice of the Count Gualtero was heard at the end of the avenue, and Editha trembled with affright, when out from plashing waters of the fountain came the fairy Truelove, and surrounded the lovers with her wings, so that the Count, who had heard voices, was greatly astonished at seeing no one.

"When the danger was over, by the Count's departure, she left her *protégés*, saying, 'Fear not, I am she who protects true lovers, and who makes blind and deaf those who love not,' and as she flew away she rifled a rose of its dew, which was the only nourishment she ever partook of.

"In the evening, when it was time for Editha and Otho to separate the fairy found them heart broken at the thought of parting. To console them, she whispered something in their ears—a something so delightful that they were in raptures.

"She asked them if they consented to what she had proposed, and on their nodding approval, touched them on the forehead with her wand.

"Suddenly Editha and Otho found themselves changed into sprays of wild thyme, planted in such close and loving proximity that their blossoms and leaves mingled in one long embrace.

"As to Count Gualtero, he is still relating to his retainers how the giant Ironhead was decapitated by a terrible thrust from the sword of Swift-and-Sure, his ancestor; and so occupied is he with his own interesting narration, that it is doubtful whether he has ever noticed the disappearance of his niece. Any more," added May, "than I have noticed, my poor Richard, how all the color has died out of your cheeks while I have been telling this foolish fairy tale. Has it tired and bothered you much?"

"No," replied Adair; "only I am sure there is a moral in it, and I am trying, with my poor brain, to make out what it is."

"This," said May; "that whatever obstacles may occur, whatever troubles exist, where there is faith and true love, happiness comes at last."

"Heaven grant that your words may prove true!" exclaimed Richard, as he pressed the hand which held the thyme blossoms within his own.

Strange though it may appear, he seemed to derive hope from May's words, and during the drive back resolved, as firmly as his poor, vacillating brain would allow, that he would not let the portrait trouble him, and that he would see it no more until he had gazed upon its flesh-and-blood original.

But, in spite of his resolve, the result of this short excursion was a further unhinging of Richard Adair's mind; and although his cheeks regained their color, and his hands lost their wax-like whiteness, his mental health retrograded as his corporeal strength advanced.

May had often heard how certain maladies leave imbecility in their train, and shuddered to think that such might be the case with her

well-beloved patient; determining, nevertheless, that nothing should deter her from linking her fate with his, and trying to shield him from trouble.

Her fears happily, however, proved groundless, for—thanks in no small degree to her unremitting attention—he eventually recovered both mental and bodily health.

"We will all three go to the seaside next week," said Doctor Prendergast, one morning. "That will set you up entirely, Richard, and bring back the roses which nursing has taken from May's cheeks."

"Oh, that will be delightful!" the young girl exclaimed. "I have never seen the sea, and you, Richard, will be the first to show it to me!"

"And is the poor old father to be deprived altogether of his office of guide and mentor, May?" asked the doctor, half-sorrowfully, half-jestingly.

"No, no, papa! I want you both to be with me when I catch my first glimpse of the mighty monster!" she replied.

"I am sorry not to be able to make one of the party."

Father and daughter looked up in surprise. It was as though some other voice than that of their companion had spoken.

"Not go with us?" they both exclaimed.

"No," replied Richard; "for I have business of importance which takes me to Paris."

May offered no remark, but could not help having what women call a good cry as soon as she was alone.

It was hard to have so pleasant a prospect spoiled by one whom she loved so well.

He might surely have told her before that he intended going to Paris.

As to confiding to her the nature of the business which demanded the journey, May's was not an exacting disposition; and after the first feeling of vexation was over, reasoned with herself that men are not like women in these things, and that a man does not always confide business matters even to the wife of his bosom.

Richard Adair left for Paris on the same day as the Prendergasts departed for the sea-side.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TABLEAU VIVANT.

FROM the quiet, drowsy town of Rocken-hurst, Richard Adair found himself transported to the noise and turmoil of that Bohemian quarter of Paris known as "La Cite," where dwelt an old schoolfellow of his, named Fitzgerald, and with whom he had kept up a correspondence during his absence in Canada; but not even to him had he divulged the story of his unfortunate marriage.

He felt, as may be imagined, little inclination for company, and had intended putting up at a hotel; but his friend whom he had informed of his advent, was not only waiting at the station to receive him, but insisted upon carrying him off to his own bachelor apartments.

The Quartier Latin, where Fitzgerald resided, lay, as it were, under the wings of the grand old Cathedral of Notre Dame, and has served as the "locale" for the dramas of novel-writers including Eugene Sue, Alexandre Dumas, and Edgar Poe. In this island of the Seine took place many of the incidents recorded in the life of that arch-poisoner, the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, unnatural daughter and faithless wife, who, in the disguise of a Sister of Mercy, commenced her experiments on the helpless patients of the Hotel Dieu; and until the advent of the Napoleonic Cæsar, who found Paris brick and left it marble, its old and picturesque houses and narrow streets were truly suggestive of underground passages, trap-doors, cut-purses, and the watch of medieval times.

It was Richard Adair's first visit to Paris, and as he opened the jalousies, and the glad morning sun poured into his room, tempting him out upon the balcony, on which were ranged, in brightly green painted tubs, olean-

ders, pomegranates, and myrtles, "all a-blowing and a-growing," as our itinerant florists have it, his sad thoughts were for a while dispelled by the novel and stirring scene beneath.

Under the archway of the court-yard opposite sits a vendor of milk, an elderly female with an ogreish cast of countenance, and a yellow handkerchief twisted around her head, dispensing to her customers a dose of yesterday's scandal, as well as a portion of this morning's lacteal fluid. Near by a fruit-vendor has established her stall, a very altar of Pomona, with its Broddingnagian apples, its Montreuil peaches, its purple plums; and grapes, black and white, from the sunny south. A cocoa-seller, with his curious tin filter fastened to his back, is vaunting the merits of his cooling, yellow-tinted beverage; a window-mender goes past with his shrill cry of "Windows to mend!" A woman tempts the juvenile population with her thin, wafer-like cakes; workmen in their blue blouses, *grisettes* and servants in their nattily-fitting dark dresses and spotless white caps, hurry to and fro; and soldiers of all sizes and in all costumes, from those of the line, looking like so many Shems, Hams, and Japhets in baggy red trowsers, to the horsehair bedecked helmeted Cuirassiers, with their jingling spurs and clanking swords, throng the street.

"Gay, sprightly land of mirth and social ease, Pleased with thyself, whom all the world can please, Alike all ages. Dames of ancient days Have led their children through thy mirthful maze; And the gay grandsire, skilled in gastric lore, Hath frisked beneath the burden of threescore."

"Yes," thought Adair; "I can easily understand that if Lady Vivian retain the characteristics of Ellen Deberle, she must prefer Paris, bright, varying, and full of color as a kaleidoscope, to the beauties even of such a proud domain as Oaklands. That she should have left me rather than encounter the monotony that would have attended her position as a doctor's wife, I can understand now; but why—why she married me, and wrecked my life, that I shall never comprehend."

His reflections were broken in upon by the cheery voice of his friend, who, after the usual matutinal greetings, turned to the important subject of breakfast.

Like most single young men, Fitzgerald took his meals at a restaurant.

"If you are not too famished to mind a walk before breakfast," he said to his companion, "we will go where you will be able to see something going on while you eat. Of this quarter, a native poet has sung:

'Here pussy flies,
Or else she dies,
A victim to gastronomy.'

And stewed rabbit is about the only dish the Cite is renowned for."

The pair finally decided for the Cafe Riche, and had scarcely taken their places at one of the tables in a large and lofty room—bright as glass, gilding, velvet, and marble could make it, to say nothing of a profusion of rainbow-hued china asters on the *comptoir*, where a sleek and smiling dame was seated—when they were joined by an aristocratic-looking, middle-aged gentleman, exceedingly well dressed, and who wore in his button-hole the riband of the "Legion of Honor."

This individual was introduced to Adair by his companion as Monsieur Hyppolite de Mirailles.

"Ah, this is the English friend, for the enjoyment of whose society you have asked for a holiday to-day!" said Monsieur de Mirailles. "If he remain in Paris until next week, you must bring him with you to the *tableaux vivants* at the Parc Monceaux. Yes, yes; he will be delighted with them; they are quite a poem of attitude and color! And so many of our Paris celebrities—ay, and of your English ones, too—are coming to see them!"

Without waiting for thanks, or even an acceptance of his offer, the good-natured little Frenchman hurried back to his table, where a sole had just been served for him.

Fitzgerald, who was employed in the

Parisian branch of an English life insurance office, informed his companion that Monsieur de Mireilles was the secretary thereof, and that one of the directors, a self-made and enormously rich man, was to give the *tableaux vivants* alluded to.

"You need not be particular about accepting the invite, for he is a parvenu—one of the mushrooms of the empire; and his house is open to any one and every one. You will meet all sorts and conditions of men—and, for that matter, of women also; so that it will be quite a toss up whether the lady rustling in silks and smothered in diamonds whom you take to the buffet for refreshments is a countess or a retired washerwoman, or the elegant youth with the black pearl studs in his shirt-front seated beside you a peer's son or a shoeblack who has made his money by dabbling on the Exchange!"

When the day for the entertainment arrived, Richard felt inclined to refuse to accompany his friend; but Fitzgerald, who had rallied him not a little on the desire he had shown, since his arrival in Paris, for wandering out alone, and on the change that had come over him since their school days, appeared so disappointed that he feared to seem ungracious, and so eventually assented.

The secret of Richard Adair's solitary excursions was his endeavor by wandering past the hotel to catch sight of Lady Vivian, but he had never yet been able to see her.

When he had first contemplated a visit to Paris he had thought of asking Doctor Prendergast for a letter of introduction to his friend and patient, but reflection showed him that such a proceeding would seem strange both to May and her father, so he abandoned it.

He had, however, in a casual sort of way, managed to obtain Lady Vivian's address.

A cab deposited the friends before the long, wide steps, which, sheltered by a large veranda, bordered with a fringe and tassel of gold, led to the house to which they were invited a little before ten o'clock.

The vestibule was furnished with a luxurious heaviness, which produced, on first entering it, an almost stifling feeling. The floor of the hall, and of the staircase leading from it to the drawing-room, were covered with a thick carpeting; and not only the doors but the walls were hung with draperies of red velvet.

The balustrade of the staircase was of black marble, with a hand-rail, composed also of crimson velvet; and at the foot of one side of the stairs was a life-sized figure of a negro, and on the other that of a negress, holding in their hands gold branches, with leaves of the pomegranate. The panels of the drawing-room door were of plate-glass set in black and gold, the door being flanked by exquisite majolica vases, filled with rare exotics.

When Fitzgerald and Adair entered the drawing-room it was nearly full, and they were conducted to their places by a servant in a gorgeous livery of crimson and gold.

The chairs of the guests were ranged in a half-circle before an impromptu theater (a raised platform, concealed by a curtain of crimson velvet, fringed with gold), access to which could be gained by the performers from the smoking-room, which had been turned into a green-room for the occasion.

Scarcely had they taken their places ere Monsieur Hyppolite de Mireilles came and welcomed them, promising Adair an introduction later on to the great financier himself, he being at that moment engaged in superintending the arrangements of the buffet in the dining-room.

Monsieur Hyppolite de Mireilles spoke English fairly well, and told his young friends, with great volubility and accent, of the troubles he had experienced as manager in arranging the evening's entertainment.

"At first," said he, "I thought I would write the poem of 'The Loves of Narcissus and the Nymph Echo' in verse; but I reflected, and then decided upon *tableaux vivants* as the more noble, and bearing more resem-

blance to the beautiful antique. You would never conceive the trouble I have had over the entertainment. What with finding the actors, surveying the rehearsals, and seeing to the dresses, it has been dreadfully harassing. Oh, the ladies, the ladies! Believe me, my dear young friends, they have no respect for the beautiful antique. If I had listened to them, my Olympians would have worn their hair in powder, and their dresses in flounces. I have nine ladies in my troupe, and only one man. It is he who plays the role of Narcissus. They wanted the most absurd things. One lady who plays a 'Grace,' because she has big feet, wanted a train to her dress that she might drape it over them; and my Venus sulked because I would not let her dress in a wild beast's skin, and this when I wanted to give a poem of attitude and color!"

"But you convinced them at last, I hope?" observed Fitzgerald.

"Yes, yes! 'I cannot sacrifice the entire work to flounces and powder, ladies,' I said."

"And the dresses are satisfactory now?"

"Delicious! delicious! delicious!" exclaimed the secretary and poet, raising his hand to his lips, and wafting a kiss heavenward. "The great Worth, who is here, has passed them in review, and declared them perfect."

"Worth? Why, I thought he would not go out on such a tour of inspection under thousands of francs!" exclaimed Fitzgerald, laughing.

"And what if he would not?" retorted the author of the poem of attitude and color, "my troupe is composed of millionaires. I must leave you now," he said, after a pause, "and see how the nine ladies and the beautiful Narcissus are getting on; for in a few moments the curtain will rise, and there are always some finishing touches wanted."

The poem of attitude and color by Monsieur Hyppolite de Mireilles, entitled "The Loves of the Nymph Echo and of the beautiful Narcissus," was announced for eleven o'clock; but it was already past that time; and, though the company were too polite to murmur, the fans of the ladies seemed to swing to and fro with angry energy, and the tumult of voices grew louder and louder.

Anon, Monsieur Hyppolite de Mireilles emerged from a hole made to the left of the curtain, into which he had plunged on leaving Richard and his companion, his coat bearing on the right shoulder an impression in white of three small fingers of a woman's hand, which had evidently been rummaging in a box of violet powder; while his right lemon-begloved hand was spotted with the rouge which had apparently put the finishing touch to one of the ladies of his troupe.

Little cared he, however, for his own toilet, since all was complete on the other side of the curtain, and he complacently settled himself down in a chair beside the two Englishmen, to enjoy the forthcoming success of his work.

The host now entered, bowing to his guests as he passed to his seat.

He was a little man, remarkable for nothing beyond his bald head and an enormous diamond ring.

At a given signal from him, a hidden orchestra commenced a voluptuous waltz, silencing in a great measure the voices of the talkers.

During its continuance Monsieur de Mireilles gave a synopsis of the first scene of the forthcoming picture to those in his immediate vicinity.

"The beautiful Narcissus," he said, "son of the River Cephise and of the nymph Liriope, despised the love of the Nymph Echo, the daughter of Air and Earth, who, being one of Juno's attendants, amused her mistress, during Jupiter's absence, with the scandals of Olympus and of mortals."

Here the narrator for some moments paused, and seemed lost in admiration at the fable he was relating.

"I have, however," he continued, "given

some scope to my imagination. The Nymph Echo, you will see, conducts the handsome Narcissus to a marine grotto, the abode of Venus, in order that the goddess may kindle in his heart the flame of love. Her power, however, is useless, and he shows, by his attitude, that he is untouched."

He had scarcely got thus far in his narration, when the velvet curtains were slowly withdrawn, and a murmur of admiration escaped from the spectators at the scene before them.

Monsieur Hyppolite de Mireilles, smiling delightedly at the success of the opening of his poem, could not resist the temptation of saying to his neighbors, loud enough for those who were not in his neighborhood to hear also, "I thought of doing it in verse; but, on reflection, I considered that the story told by attitude and color would be more classical and more worthy of the great antique"—a sentence that had been on Monsieur Hyppolite Mireilles's lips ever since the *tableaux* had been intrusted to him.

The background of the scene represented a grotto composed of some silky material, broken up into folds to imitate the anfractuosity of the rock, and upon it were painted shells, fish and huge marine plants, the ground being sprinkled with fine sand, intermixed with pearls and sparklets of silver.

Seated upon a throne, represented by a hillock of sand, similarly intermixed with silver grains, was the queen of this retreat.

She who represented Venus was rather coarsely fashioned in figure; but she bore herself with dignity, and her flashing eyes and commanding figure invested the character with the fierceness of one demanding rather than bestowing love.

Posed behind her, showing only a pretty little head, her wings, and her silver quiver, was the lady who had undertaken the character of Cupid.

To the right of Venus were the three Graces in flowing muslin, smiling and interlaced, as in the group by Pradier.

At the foot of Venus's throne lay a dark brunette representing La Volupte. She had let loose her magnificent hair, which fell in heavy masses over her tawny-colored tunic, striped with flames of a dull red.

The drama, as it were, of the picture took place in the foreground, where the Nymph Echo, extending her eyes toward the Goddess of Love, had her head turned half away from Narcissus, as though supplicating him to look at Venus, whose glance alone can light in the hearts of mortals the terrible fire of love; while Narcissus, making a gesture of refusal with one hand, hid his face with the other; and preserved an icy coldness of demeanor.

The costumes of these two characters had, M. Hyppolite de Mireilles declared, cost him an infinity of trouble. He who played Narcissus (a youth perfect in limb, but effeminate in face) was attired as an ideal hunter; in a vest and tights of green satin, fitting closely to the body, and wearing entwined in his head a wreath of oak leaves. The dress of the nymph was of itself a perfect allegory. On it were represented trees and mountains, and resounding grottoes, where the voices of Earth and Air reply to each other; a skirt of white satin was a rock, the leafy girdle an underwood, the blue gauze of the body the cloudless sky. The group all sustained the immobility of statues; but the palm was awarded to the Nymph Echo, upon whose face was depicted an agonized smile which strove to appear humble, but through which gleamed the teeth of a wolf hungering for its prey.

Amid the applause of the audience the curtains were drawn to, and conversation again became general, and M. Hyppolite de Mireilles was overwhelmed with congratulations on the success of the first portion of the poem.

"In the next part you will think, perhaps," said that gentleman, "that I have almost exceeded the bounds of poetic license. In it the Nymph Echo, finding that Venus has no power

over the beautiful Narcissus, conducts him to the realms of Plutus. After the temptation of the flesh, the temptation of gold."

"Ah, M. de Mireilles," said one of his hearers, "you perfectly understand the times in which we live!"

After a wait of some fifteen minutes, the orchestra playing a triumphal and somewhat noisy march, the curtains were again withdrawn.

The scene was a dazzling one.

Another grotto was presented to the view; but this time it was not the cool retreat of Venus, carpeted with fine sands and shells, but a cave situated in the bowels of the earth, the silk of which it was composed now imitating veins of metallic ore.

The ground, by a daring anachronism, was strewn with innumerable genuine louis d'or*, which in one place were heaped together so as to form a throne in the same way as the sand had formed a throne for Venus in the preceding scene.

On one side of the throne was a huge brazier, in which gold ingots and precious stones appeared to be melting, and upon this the electric light, now changed from a roseate to a fiery hue, fell. Upon the throne was seated a very beautiful woman, representing Plutus—not Plutus as a god, but as a goddess—her bust emerging from a laminated robe of gold, ornamented with precious stones. Her fair hair was loose, and powdered with gold; her hand held a bouquet, the stems and leaves of which were gold, and the flowers of precious stones.

Around her were grouped "Gold," in a robe of cloth of gold that was dazzling to look upon; "Silver," in one of silver tissue, shining like a moonbeam; "Sapphire," in a dark blue velvet, bordered with gold like the setting of a ring; "Turquoise," in a satin of tender blue; and "Coral" in a daring dress of pink and red.

The bracelets, necklets, rings and other ornaments worn by the performers, were composed of the jewels which they represented, while those of "Gold" and "Silver" were made of coins of those respective metals.

In the foreground the drama practically remained the same, with Echo attempting to overcome Narcissus by the sight of Plutus, and Narcissus again, "by a gesture," refusing to gaze upon the occupant of the throne.

The second tableau was even more to the taste of the spectators than had been the first—this clinking of modern coinage in a representation of ancient mythology seemed so excessively ingenious, and the words, "Oh, what a number of gold pieces!" ran from mouth to mouth, and each one pictured himself as the possessor of all this wealth.

The giver of the entertainment had struck a clever chord, and by having drawn from his bank (among his other speculations was that of a banker) a few chests of gold, he had conveyed to the minds of his guests an impression of unlimited wealth—wealth of which, in reality, he was only the custodian.

As the curtains closed, the orchestra terminated the triumphal march by a series of separate notes, in which the cymbals clashed as though they were the final sounds of the gold pieces jingling against each other.

Turning to his companion, Fitzgerald was struck by the pallor which had spread over Adair's face.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

Adair answered that the heat of the room had made him feel rather faint, but that he was better now, and would prefer remaining to the end than disturbing the many people they would have to pass if they left their places.

To the opening of the third and last scene, the orchestra commenced a prelude in a minor key, full, as it were, of grief-stricken sounds.

The scene represented a woodland glade, which the electric light bathed in a flood of sunshine. It was altogether an imaginary

glade, with blue trees, and large flowers of yellow and red, which mounted nearly to the height of the trees themselves.

A grassy knoll, now, did duty for a throne, and upon it were seated Plutus and Venus, surrounded by the dryads and nymphs of the trees, of the fountains, and of the hills, summoned to witness the vengeance of Olympus.

The beauteous Narcissus, reclining by the side of a rivulet, surveyed his features in the clear mirror which represented the water. He was no longer the Narcissus of the forest, roaming and free; Venus had with her extended finger struck him for daring to disown her power. He was turning into a flower, of which his lower limbs, in their tight-fitting green satin coverings seemed to be the stem; his legs, slightly bent, appeared to be taking root in the mound of mossy earth around him. His bust, adorned with large flaps of white satin, seemed to expand into a wondrous corolla, and his fair hair was so arranged as to form the yellow pistils amidst the white of the petals.

A few paces from him lay the Nymph Echo. Little by little the sun's rays were turning her into stone—no vulgar stone disfigured by moss, but into a statue of pure white marble; marble portrayed by her white arms and throat, and by her dress of snowy white, from which the blue scarf that had been worn across her bodice, and her girdle of leaves, had fallen to the ground. Motionless as the marble she represented, nothing seemed living in this body but her woman's eyes, which were fixed with burning glances upon the water-flower, whose look, also still human, was too intently fixed upon its own reflection to notice hers.

The orchestra played a few bars to represent the lament of the Nymphs of the Forest, the curtains of velvet and gold were again drawn together, and the poem of attitude and color was at an end.

Somehow, the last scene, poetically tragic as it was, had not the same effect upon the spectators as the preceding one; indeed, anything after the gold pieces could but be an anti-climax.

"She was completely covered with rice powder," whispered one lady to her neighbor, alluding to the Nymph Echo.

"One of the legs of Narcissus was most ungracefully posed," observed another to her cavalier. And though the company applauded, as well-bred guests should do, they hurried from their places, more intent upon getting a good place at the buffet in the dining-room than upon what they had just seen.

"Let us go and get something to eat, Richard," said Fitzgerald to his companion, being in the same mind as the majority of the guests.

"No; I think I will go home, if you will put me into a cab," replied Adair.

"You are seriously ill!" exclaimed the first speaker, noting that his companion was extremely pale, and could scarcely rise from his seat.

"No; only the heat of the room rather overcomes me. I have not yet recovered from the illness I had in England," was the reply.

Fitzgerald was about to give his friend his arm, when Richard said, in tones which in vain he endeavored to render steady, "Do you know the name of the lady who played in the tableaux?"

"Do you mean the Nymph Echo?"

"No," replied Adair. "I mean the lady who represented Plutus."

"I do not; but Hyppolite will doubtless know," said Fitzgerald.

It appeared that she was an Englishwoman, Monsieur knowing her well; indeed, Lady Vivian was well known in most Parisian circles.

As Adair had anticipated, the woman dressed in a golden robe, her hair loose and powdered with gold, her hand carrying a bouquet of gold and precious stones, was the same whom seven years before he had seen by the sea-side dressed in a loose white wrapper, with long

hanging sleeves, her hair pearly by the sea-spray, and her hand carrying a bouquet of seaweed.

Yes, the woman was the same, although her role was changed from Venus to that of Plutus.

CHAPTER IX.

RESOLVED.

RICHARD ADAIR had for weeks been nerving himself for the meeting with his wife, and the preparation stood him in good stead, since it enabled him to behave with tolerable self-possession during the remainder of his stay at the financier's abode.

His friend, at his earnest request, remained after him; and on reaching the apartments where he was staying, Richard, without stopping in the ante-chamber to light the candle which was placed for him, went direct to his bedroom, where he flung himself into a chair, and in darkness thought over the events of the past, and tried to fix upon some plan for future action.

In his heart, he had known all along that the fatal picture at Oaklands was the likeness of his wife, and the resolve to seek Lady Vivian out before admitting it was but a subterfuge to put off the evil day.

The evil day had now come, and not a shadow of hope remained. He would see Lady Vivian, tax her with being the Ellen Deberle whom he had married, and either tell May the truth, or let her think him fickle and unworthy of her. Better, perhaps, the latter; she would the sooner be cured of her love for him. How he regretted having wrung from her that avowal of affection—"If any thing were to separate us I think I should die."

And there was yet another who had to be considered in this terrible business, since Ellen Deberle and Lady Vivian were one and the same person.

His son! The thought came to him as a ray of light piercing through the darkness which encompassed him, and his heart yearned toward the lad.

After a restless night, in which snatches of slumber came to him with even more anguish and horror than his waking thoughts, he rose with the determination of telling Lady Vivian he had discovered her identity with that of his wife.

CHAPTER X.

FACE TO FACE.

"I AM delighted to make the acquaintance of any friend of Doctor Prendergast, and the future husband of his daughter is doubly welcome."

Such was the reception Lady Vivian gave to Richard Adair, as he entered her boudoir in her house, situated in the suburbs of Paris, the day after the *tableaux vivants* at the financier's house in the Parc Monceaux.

He had not sent up his name, but had simply written in pencil on a slip of paper, "A friend of Doctor Prendergast's is desirous of seeing Lady Vivian."

He saw she recognized him, but his advent did not startle, though it surprised her; and she led off the game which she foresaw was about to be played between them with a trump card by letting him know she was aware of his engagement to May—a bit of village gossip her maid had accidentally repeated to her mistress.

Richard took the seat to which she motioned him. He was too agitated to do more than bow in reply to her welcome.

She, on her side, retained the utmost composure, and resolving apparently that there should be no embarrassing break in the conversation, overwhelmed him with questions, to which she did not even expect an answer, about her dear friends in England, how he liked Paris, and whether he intended to remain long, etc., etc.

"So they are at the sea-side," she said, alluding to the Prendergasts. "Ah, it is strange how differently the sea affects different per-

*This was actually done at a financier's under the empire.

sons. For my part, I hate it, and could never remain at one place for more than two consecutive days!"

"Never, Lady Vivian?"

"Never!" she replied, emphatically, looking him full in the face. "It is very ungrateful of me, too," she added, "for after Lord Vivian's death it was a scamper through some half-dozen watering-places that restored me to health."

"Your ladyship must be especially grateful to Wemlake-super-Mare?"

"Wemlake-super-Mare? I do not remember to have heard of such a place," she replied, calmly.

Her self-possession staggered him for a moment, but he returned, after a short pause, to the attack.

"Your ladyship bears a very wonderful resemblance to a lady whom an intimate friend of mine met there—a Madame Ellen Deberle."

He pronounced the name firmly and distinctly and in his turn looked hard at her.

Her features remained immovable; but her fingers, which had been lying listlessly in her lap, entwined themselves convulsively. "I am afraid my countenance must be a common one," she said. "So many persons have been mistaken for me, and I for so many persons. Who might this Ellen Deberle have been?" she added, speaking the name with equal firmness and distinctness.

"Shall I tell you her story?"

"If it is a romantic one, yes; for I like romances, and it will amuse me."

"The story is romantic, but it is too terrible to amuse you, I think."

She leaned back in the *causeuse*, on which she was sitting in a graceful attitude, like one who in an indolent way is going to listen to some indifferent tale, and without replying to his remarks, nodded to him to proceed.

With a calmness which surprised even himself, he related the history of his short courtship, his short marriage life, the scene at the railway station, his dispatch, his search after his lost wife, his departure to and return from Canada, the new love that had sprung up within his breast, and his recognition of the likeness in the picture, relating it as some story learned by heart, which in no way affected himself.

But when he came to the end his self-control was gone, and, in agonized tones, he exclaimed, "In Heaven's name, Lady Vivian, say what is this unhappy man to do?"

"I should advise your friend," she replied, unmoved by his emotion, "to let things take their course as though he had never discovered his long-lost wife. My belief is that this woman—this Ellen—Ellen Deberle, I think you called her—having left him of her own free will, will never trouble him more. She evidently never cared for your friend, and was altogether unworthy of his love. Why, then, should he sacrifice not only his own happiness, but also that of a good and loving girl, and thus lose the substance while running after the shadow? Let him treat the matter as though his wife were dead; no one will be injured by his so doing, and your friend's happiness and that of the woman to whom he is engaged will be secured."

Her sophistry almost convinced him.

"This wife," she continued, "will, I should say, never reveal the secret; for doubtless, in acting as she has done, she has some end to serve, which the publication of her marriage might thwart."

"You are right; the preservation of a princely estate for her son, and her own occupation of it during his long minority," exclaimed Adair.

It was the first time the heirship to Oaklands had been mentioned between them, and the blow so suddenly struck went home.

"You would not beggar your own son?" she said, thrown completely off her guard.

The tale of her husband's sorrow had not produced one expression of sympathy from her, but the thought of this blow falling on her boy

brought tears to her eyes, for it meant the loss of Oaklands to herself.

"The son must be content to share his father's lot, however lowly it may be. It were better so than that he should be the possessor of riches to which he has no just claim, and from which he may, when he attains to man's estate, be ousted as an impostor," observed Adair.

"On that point let me say a word," Lady Vivian exclaimed, as she rose and drew herself up to her full height. "I will speak as Ellen Deberle, as Lady Vivian, as any mother would speak in defense of her son's rights. Even if such a marriage as you tell me of ever did take place, the boy may still be Lord Vivian's son; but I deny that the marriage ever can be proved. The clergyman, even then an old man, has, doubtless, now passed away; and, if not, what would his testimony as to a person's identity whom he had seen only few minutes, and seven years ago, be worth? A five-pound note, probably; and a fifty-pound note certainly would, if placed before the landlady's eyes, prevent her recognizing her quondam lodger. The bride, from what you yourself know of her, would certainly be too wise to sign the registry in her usual hand, and not a scrap of her writing seems ever to have passed into her so-called husband's clutch. Where, then, are your proofs? I tell you, that he who asserted such a tale would be treated either as an impostor, striving to extort money, or as a monomaniac. In one case a prison, in the other a lunatic asylum, awaits him."

Richard Adair was too completely taken aback by the speaker's words to reply.

She saw the advantage she had gained, and triumphantly repeated, "Where, then, are your proofs?"

A pattering of feet, at this juncture, came along the passage. The door was flung open, and a child ran into the room, followed by an elderly person, apparently his nurse.

"There, Lady Vivian," replied Adair, pointing to Susannah Greig—"there is my proof!"

The maid, if she recognized her former master, showed no sign of it, by word or movement.

Her countenance was inflexible as a mask.

The boy was, so far as his body was concerned, the picture of robust health; but it revolted Adair's very soul to think that his son—he had no doubt now but that he was his son—should be under the tutelage of this revolting woman, Susannah.

He took the little fellow on his knee and kissed him, a proceeding that did not seem to be relished by Lady Vivian, who soon signed to Susannah to take him away.

The youngster was not, however, inclined to depart.

"Oh! why have I not got a papa, like other boys, instead of only a cross old nurse?" he cried, as she took him away in her arms.

The words, so casually spoken, struck home to Adair's heart, and seemed to tell him of the duty that lay before him.

"Could you not have let him remain with me a few moments?" he said, reproachfully, when he and Lady Vivian were again alone.

"To what end?" she said, replying to his question by asking another. "I have no wish to wound your feelings," she added; "but Lord Vivian and Doctor Prendergast's son-in-law can have but little in common with each other."

"Let us drop this fencing," he said, angrily.

"You are my wife, the boy is my son, and I am resolved to claim him. Heaven knows but for him I would go away, and never trouble you more."

"And as things are?"

"I will return to Canada, and take the boy with me. Have no fear, Lady Vivian; I will not tear away your mask, but leave it to you to say that he has gone away with a tutor, or to make up any tale you choose. I imagine you will not find it difficult to invent a plausible story."

"And May Prendergast?"

"Will think me a villain who has deserted her."

"That is your resolve?"

"It is."

"And its price?"

"I do not understand you."

"No? Well, do not mind mentioning a large one. I am rich, and shall not object sharing part of my fortune with the man who imagines himself to be my husband."

"Lady Vivian, this is an insult!"

"No; it is only an offer; and whether you accept it or not, the world will believe that you have hatched up a tale in order to rid yourself of a girl who has become distasteful to you; and to extort money from a helpless woman. You are still resolved on claiming Lord Vivian as your son?"

"More so than ever; for I see the necessity of removing him from the pernicious influence of one who would circulate such a report about his father."

"And how long do you give me to prepare him and myself for the separation?"

"Whatever time you wish, in reason."

"Thanks. Lord Vivian gives a children's reception, and I want you to see him in his proper sphere. Perhaps you will then admit that by removing him from it you will deserve the boy's hate rather than his love. Nay, you cannot refuse me. Just now you blamed me for not giving him so short a time in your company, and now I say, 'Come to-morrow; see and study the boy.' To-morrow, at three o'clock, I shall expect you."

Lady Vivian rung the bell for the servant, and, with a stately bend of the head, intimated that the present interview was at an end.

CHAPTER XI.

"CHIEFLY WITH THE JUVENILES."

A MAN-SERVANT, in evening dress and white tie, opened the door to the visitors, as each carriage ground its way along the newly-laid gravel drive which led to Lady Vivian's house.

It was a dull afternoon, but as soon as the door of the room on the ground floor, where the company was assembling, was opened, a flood of light streamed forth, dazing the eyes of the visitors.

The venetian blinds had been closed, and the curtains drawn, so that no ray of daylight penetrated.

The antechamber into which the guests were ushered was known as the "Japanese Chamber," on account of hangings and decorations. Beyond it was the large drawing-room in black and gold, where, the velvet chairs uncovered, the large glass chandelier lit, and the vases filled with flowers, gave it the appearance of a room prepared for a ball of full-grown persons.

Both children and their protectors were rapidly arriving at the time Richard Adair put in an appearance, the former attired in fancy dress, for it was a children's masquerade ball Lady Vivian was giving in honor of her son's birthday.

On the threshold stood little Lord Vivian, dressed as a Pompadour marquis, in a white satin coat, sprigged with tiny bouquets of roses, a waistcoat bound with gold lace, and breeches of cherry-colored silk, while his tiny hands and neck were surrounded with delicate lace ruffles, and a toy sword hung from his left side.

With his powdered head thrown slightly back, and his gold-laced hat under his arm, he received each of his visitors on their arrival with a stately bow; offered his arm to the female ones, and conducted them to the drawing room with so grave and lordly an air, that even Adair, who was anxiously watching him, could not repress a smile.

Now it was a little thing of some five summers, dressed in white as a milk-girl, to whom he offered his arm; and now to a tall, dark girl of fourteen, attired as a Spanish donna, the customary mantilla of black lace and the usual red rose adorning her head. Nor did he find himself the least embarrassed by the

arrival of five sisters ranging from the age of two to ten years, all dressed as Red Riding Hoods, in flame-colored satin, trimmed with broad velvet bands, and aprons of Mechlin lace; but, throwing down his hat, he offered his arms to the two eldest, and marched triumphantly forward, followed by the three others.

Boys as well as girls now arrived in bands. There were three harlequins, two "Punches," a "Figaro," unlimited Tyroliens, Scotchmen, and Matadors; while a mite of two and a half years wore his costume of Pierrot so comically that all the ladies took him in their arms and kissed him—a proceeding that did not altogether meet with the youngster's approval.

Some of the arrangements of the *soiree* at the financier's house seemed to repeat themselves at Lady Vivian's, for there was at one end of the room a raised platform draped with red curtains, in front of which chairs were ranged in a semicircle.

This room was now full, and the light from the chandelier illuminated some seventy children heaped together pell-mell, the parents, in somber toilets, forming a dark border to the mass of blue and scarlet, purple and gold, white and silver of their fancy dresses.

The master of the ceremonies having called "Attention!" all eyes were fixed upon the curtains which slowly opened, and revealed to the lookers-on a *marionette* theater.

A profound silence succeeded to the shrill voices that had hitherto rung through the room as Punch bounded on the stage, with so ferocious a "squeak" as at once to frighten and charm the youngsters.

The drama was the old familiar one of "Punch and Judy," in which the hero, with furious gayety, tramples upon all laws human and divine, beats the Beadle, kills the partner of his bosom, throws his child out of the window, slaughters the Policeman, and hangs Jack Ketch. At each blow of his cudgel, falling and caving in the wooden heads of the puppets, the small audience shrieked with delight, and when he knocked off the policeman's head their joy knew no bounds, and they pushed and hustled each other about for very sympathy, longing, as it seemed, to take part in the performance.

One little girl, to show her knowledge of the drama, explained to her less advanced companions what was about to take place.

"By-and-by he will kill his wife, and they will hang him!" she said, solemnly.

Another child wanted to know why he was not put on bread and water for his supper; and when his Satanic majesty appeared and claimed Mr. Punch, they applauded with their tiny hands, and jumped up and down in their seats until the chairs ran a very good chance of as complete a demolition as the Punch family.

Then followed a conjuror; but, after the previous excitement, this performance met with very little success; some of the tiny mites fell fast asleep, while the children of a larger growth yawned discreetly behind their fans; and the announcement of refreshments in the dining-room was welcomed as an opportune relief.

Lord Vivian led the way, giving his arm to a charming girl wearing a Japanese costume, the dress being of purple satin, embroidered with flowers and strange birds, and her hair twisted into a high chignon, pierced with two gold pins.

The pair had so delicate and exquisite an appearance in their dresses of gold, embroidered purple, and flower-tufted white, that they might have passed for two Dresden statuettes suddenly sprung into life.

A magic sight met the children's view as they flocked into the dining-room.

A long table, lighted with two candelabras of eight branches each, besides the hanging-lamp, was spread with china, glass, plate and flowers. In the center, and at each end, were huge baskets of exotics, separated by dessert-dishes, filled either with fruits or bonbon surprises. Scattered about were cakes and pas-

tries of all kinds, pyramids of preserved fruits, piles of sandwiches, dishes of sweets and of biscuits, jellies trembling in their crystal vases, creams frothing to the top of porcelain bowls, and bottles of champagne not higher than one's hand, made, apparently for the small guests, glittered in their silver head-pieces.

It was a feast a child would dream of as coming from the horn of plenty of some good fairy.

Lord Vivian, as donor of the feast, was allowed to uncork the first bottle of champagne, which he did so awkwardly as to deluge his silk breeches with the foaming liquor, a misfortune he bore with the greatest unconcern.

Then came a rush for the bon-bons, which inclosed golden butterflies, birds of gorgeous plumage, grotesque costumes, imitation jewelry, and, last and best of all, slips of detonating paper, which, for a few moments, produced a miniature musketry fire.

The fun waxed fast and furious, and was at its height, when the sounds of a quadrille played on a piano in the adjoining room issued through the open door, and summoned back the youngsters to the drawing-room.

The dance was opened by little Lord Vivian and the girl in the Japanese costume. They got rather mixed in the figures, but nothing could destroy the grace of the pair, while around them the less accomplished children jumped up and down, round and round, anyhow and to any measure, perfectly satisfied so long as they did not remain still.

After the dance, as Lord Vivian passed where Richard Adair was seated, the latter took him upon his knee, and said, "You are enjoying yourself, my little man?"

"Yes," replied the child; "but I like Oaklands better. Oaklands is in England, you know; we play cricket there, and I have my pony. You must come and see Oaklands; there isn't such a place as Oaklands in the big world."

The words were overheard by Lady Vivian, who was hovering near them, and she gave Richard a significant look.

Husband and wife had hitherto exchanged no more than the usual courtesies common between hostess and visitor; and Lady Vivian had not placed any obstacle in the way of Richard Adair conversing with her son.

The guests were beginning to depart, when Lady Vivian, seating herself, as though by chance, in a chair close to where Richard was standing, entered into conversation with him by saying that she had heard he was a great admirer of flowers.

"Yes; I am an admirer of Nature, in all her forms of beauty," he assented.

"Now," exclaimed she, smiling, "you have quite spoiled a proposal I was about to make to you."

"Which was—"

"To show you my conservatory. But, alas! I fear you will find in it more art—gardener's art—than nature; at least, cold European nature. For, although floricultural connoisseurs declare I have a very rare collection of orchids, and I know for myself that I have some palms which would not disgrace Kew, yet of

"Daisies pied, and violets blue,
And lady smocks all silver white,
And cuckoo buds of yellow hue,
That paint the meadow with delight,

"I have none. However, pray come and see, and judge for yourself."

Richard, assuming that his hostess wished for an opportunity of saying a few words to him where there was no chance of their being overheard, offered her his arm, and they entered the conservatory.

Palms reached to the very roof, pressing against their glass cage as though they were trying to force themselves, forgetting that the desired freedom would bring death with it.

Bananas bent with the weight of their clustering fruit; orchids, in baskets, suspended by slight chains, shed their perfumes around, like unto living censers. Tree-ferns spread their huge fans of vivid green above the beds, the

mold of which was concealed by luxuriant fern mosses, wherein was planted a profusion of exotics.

Heaths, with their stems almost hidden by pink and white blossoms; bigonias, with their leaves veined and spotted with crimson; gloxinias, with their velvet-like foliage and purple bells; orange trees, upon which a few stray blossoms still lingered, and against whose shining, dark green leaves the golden fruit made a delightful contrast; while in the midst of this mass of tropical verdure and blossom was a fountain, representing a triton, in black marble, from whose conch spouted a silvery stream, which fell into a basin of similar material, pearling, as with artificial dew, the pink, azure and white nemiphars which floated on the water.

The atmosphere was suffocating, with that kind of heat which does not seem to fall from the sky in a shower of fire-sparks, but rather to rise, like an unhealthy exhalation, from the earth.

Here Lady Vivian had heaped up the riches of the floral world; but for a short time only would the atmosphere allow her to enjoy them.

Motioning Richard to a seat, overhung by the branches of a fine camellia, whose green buds gave promise of a wealth of winter blossom, she said, abruptly, "You heard what the boy said just now—would you still rob him of an inheritance which he loves so dearly?"

"It would be an act of restitution, rather than of robbery."

"Restitution!" she exclaimed, contemptuously. "Why, you would act like those mediæval outlaws who used to take from one traveler to give to another; with this difference—that while they took from the rich to give to the poor, you would take from my son in order to further enrich one who is already a millionaire—one who neither expects, nor, but for his vindictive dislike to myself, would desire, my boy's lands!"

Richard not immediately replying to her words, Lady Vivian seemed to think that they had been powerless to move him; and so from reasoning she proceeded to persuasion, and, taking his hand in hers, eloquently begged him not to ruin her fair name nor beggar her child.

But the hand that once could thrill his every nerve with rapture had that power no longer, and he felt no more fascinated than he would have done had some beautiful snake glided out from among the tropical verdure.

May's pure image was too deeply enshrined in his breast for any other woman's influence to be felt; while his fresh, breeze-loving senses revolted against the enervating atmosphere.

"It is time that I was gone," he said, coldly.

This reception of her friendly advances hurt Lady Vivian's pride; but she managed, with the tact of a woman of the world, to disguise her annoyance.

"Come and see me again when you have had time to think well over the matter," she said to him as he took his leave. "If you could make the boy richer and happier than he now is, you should have him; but reared as he has been, and with his character, which I know so well, his life would be a torture were he removed from the luxuries he has been accustomed to. Nay, I believe it would kill him!"

"And I'm sure it would kill me to lose Oaklands," she added, to herself.

Richard passed out from the brilliantly-lighted house into the pale twilight of the waning afternoon.

"Was it not emblematic of the change which would take place in his son's life if he were to claim him?" he thought. "After all, was it not better to let the past remain as a dream? Evidently the boy was cared for in every respect, and would, if his father did not interfere, some day occupy a rich and influential position."

Victor Hugo, in his "Toilers of the Sea," gives an account of the way in which the pieuvre lies in wait far down in the sea, below the roots of the rock, and how this "devil-fish"

paralyzes the victim by fastening its tentacles one, by one upon and slowly dragging it, numbed and unresisting, into the center of its soft, cruel arms.

Fate seemed to be playing the part of the pieuvre toward Adair, sending out one feeler after another to fix upon him, and try and deaden his sense of right; to stifle his conscience, and drag him down to an abyss, from which he would have no more power of returning than had the bones of the pieuvre's victims, which lay whitening before the monster's den in the twilight depths of some sea-cave.

Yes, every thing at this moment seemed to conspire against his performing what conscience told him was his duty, and to allow things to take the course they would have done had he never seen that fatal picture at Oaklands, especially as this performance of his duty was fraught not only with trouble for others, but peril to himself. Lady Vivian, he felt sure, would deny the marriage, and probably declare his statement to be invented for the purposes she had mentioned; and should he fail in disproving the accusation, he would be branded as the vilest of men.

Then, as a climax, came a letter from Doctor Prendergast, urging his return to England.

"May is ailing, and your return can alone save my child's life," were the words with which it concluded.

In many respects, Adair's character was a weak one. His nature was affectionate, and he hated giving pain, even though that pain might, in the end, produce beneficial results.

No wonder, therefore, that he decided to do as the doctor asked him, and, again putting off the evil day, wait for May's restoration to health before breaking to her the news of the situation in which he was placed.

He would not see Lady Vivian again before leaving Paris, for to tell her of his resolve would be to make himself an active instead of a passive accomplice in her deceit.

He must henceforth avoid, not seek her.

CHAPTER XII.

SUBMITTING TO FATE.

ON reaching Rockenhurst, Adair found May still a prey to cerebral fever, and seated by her sick-bed, as she had sat by his, he learned with pain, but with a deepening affection, that her heart was all his own.

For days she lay between life and death, but at last a favorable change took place; and when consciousness returned, finding her lover by her side, her recovery was much more rapid than his had been.

Ere the autumnal-tinted leaves had fallen to the ground, or the chrysanthemums had ceased to flower, May and Richard had pledged their troth to each other in the sight of Heaven, but, though the woman knew it not, against the laws of man.

Adair had reasoned with himself that it was the only way to save his darling; and his weak nature, yielding to the strong current of events, sought not to battle against, but allowed itself to be borne along with it.

He begged Doctor Prendergast to allow of their being married in London, and in the quietest manner—indeed, for no one but themselves to be present; assigning for his reason, that he had always entertained a wish to be married at a certain out-of-the-way old church, which he had attended at the time he was a medical student.

This request did not please Dr. Prendergast any more than the excuse satisfied him; but since Adair's illness he had learned to look upon his future son-in-law as an eccentric individual, and but for May's steadfast devotion, would have wished the engagement with his daughter broken off.

One bright but chilly morning in November the trio came up to town by an early train, Richard directing the cabman they hired at London Bridge to an old church which lay perdu behind a labyrinth of warehouses in the very heart of the city, but shut out by them from its noise and turmoil.

Its churchyard had once been a burial-ground, and the grass had grown sufficiently high in it to half cover the grave-stones with which it was thickly studded.

In summer, some half-dozen lime trees, flourishing in spite of London smoke, made it appear as peaceful and green a resting-place as though it were some quiet country churchyard, while a chirping colony of sparrows had got to look upon it as their own particular recreation ground.

The church itself was a mildewed old place, with high-backed pews and a splendidly-carved oak roof, which either want of energy or of money had saved from the desecration of the Puritan whitewashers.

It boasted also a tomb with the recumbent effigies of a knight in armor, and his spouse in a martingale and ruffles.

It was not the sort of church to attract a regular congregation; for its venerable pastor and its wheezy clerk went through the services with the regularity of mill-horses, and with the solemnity of funeral mourners.

Still, it was a place where the dreamer would willingly rest on a sultry Sunday afternoon, and, while the drowsy tones of the minister fell as soothingly and meaninglessly upon his ear as the humming of bees, let his imagination run riot, and conjure up before his mind's eye the congregation of former days, when the women in their linsey-wolseys and white linen wimples, and the men in their trunk hose and pointed shoes, came weekly to be called to account, not only for their spiritual but also for their mundane faults; and, perchance, to be told by some energetic preacher to go home and cut away their vanity-savoring love-locks, or to curtail the limits of their shoe-points, or the width of their cuffs and ruffles.

In this depressing edifice the marriage-ceremony was mumbled through, the pew-owner acting as a sort of impromptu bridemaid, and the snuffy old clerk as best man.

No organ-strains, pealing out Mendelssohn's grand "Wedding March" greeted the newly-married couple's passage down the aisle; no joy-bells fell upon their ears as they entered the cab awaiting them outside the church.

Doctor Prendergast was not only dispirited, but indignant, at having his daughter smuggled through the marriage-service.

Richard Adair was pale and gloomy, for he had caught sight, as they were signing the registry in the vestry, of the cold, gray eyes of Lady Vivian's maid peering in at the door.

Had he seen her before, instead of after he had pronounced the fatal words "I will," he would probably, at all risks, have stopped the marriage, and told May how he was situated; but it was then too late, and he tried to reassure himself by the thought that she had followed them in order to convey to her mistress the welcome news that he would henceforth not dare to claim her.

May was the only one of the party who was bright and cheerful, and even she shuddered as, passing out under the old stone porch, on which was covered the tragic scene of Herodias carrying the head of John the Baptist on a charger, the eyes of the decapitated martyr seemed to look upon her with mournful pity.

From the church they drove to the Great Western Hotel, where the small party was to breakfast prior to the departure of the newly-married couple on their wedding tour.

Richard was standing alone in the room where the meal was to be served—Doctor Prendergast and his daughter having gone out to purchase a railway rug—when the waiter told him that a lady wished to see him.

In an instant he divined that it was Susannah, and in order to get rid of her before May's return, he nerved himself for the interview, and gave orders for her admittance.

She came in, in her usually cool and collected manner, and opened the conversation by asking him if he were not surprised to see her, and then passed on to state that she had not been a witness to the ceremony on her mistress's behalf, but on her own.

"On your own?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, on my own," she repeated; "and it may be a relief to you to know that I wish you no harm, and it is in your power to keep me silent as to what I have to-day witnessed," she added.

"You mean to say that your silence must be bought?"

"That is rather a hard way of putting it, Mr. Adair; but, after all, it brings matters to the point. Yes, I do want you to pay me for keeping your secret. I have served your *wife*"—she emphasized the word *wife*, looking up at him as she did so—"and the bondage has been very irksome."

"You have served it, doubtless, for some ultimate reward?"

"Yes, sir. When my father died it was found that he had mortgaged the cottage in which I was born, and the bit of land in which it stood, for very nearly its full value. He was a drunkard, and, like all drunkards, sacrificed every thing to drink. No one but myself attached any value to the spot, but for me it contained the only bit of romance that has lightened my dull, prosaic life, since in it the only lover I ever had asked me to be his wife, and within one of its rooms—he was a lodger of ours—he died of consumption."

She paused a moment, and then resumed, in her cold, measured tones.

"For a small sum the other members of our family allowed me the right of redeeming it, and to that end I have scraped and saved every penny that I could lay my hands on. To-day I find myself possessed of nearly the requisite sum."

"That is well," observed Adair.

"You are mistaken, sir; it is not well, for just as the dream of my life seems about to be realized, the person who has the cottage dies, and the executors will, in a week hence, dispose of it unless the money is forthcoming."

"And so you come to me?"

"A minute, if you please, sir. Before doing so I applied to Lady Vivian, but it was at an unfortunate moment, when she was in one of her gloomy and irritable moods. She refused, declaring that I wanted to extort money from her, that I was liberally paid for my services, and that if she acceded to this request I should ere long be making another. I lost my temper, gave her a month's notice to quit her service, and having heard from Mrs. Prendergast's maid of the intended wedding, determined to ask you for what I require."

"You say that Lady Vivian refused you the money in a fit of irritation?"

"She did, sir; and had I again asked her, would *probably* have relented, and given it to me. The matter was, however, too urgent for *probabilities*. With you—once married to Miss Prendergast—I was *sure* of it; so I came up by the same train I had learned that you would travel by, engaged a cabman to follow your vehicle first to the church, and then on to here."

"You shall have the money," Adair said.

"In return for your kindness, sir," she said, "I will, besides keeping your secret, tell you the circumstances under which my lady married you, and why she did so under a false name."

"When Lord Vivian died, my lady was in a terrible state of mind on account of the estate going from her, and the doctor who attended her—Miss May's father—ordered her off, at once, to the sea-side."

"From the very moment her departure was arranged, she resolved to set aside her name—since, every time she was addressed by it, she was reminded of being a dowerless widow."

"On our arrival at Wemlake, she assumed the name of Deberle, which had been that of one of the nuns of the convent in Paris where she was educated."

"She met you, sir; your attentions to her, and your freshness and buoyancy (so pleasant a contrast to her late sad surroundings), took her fancy."

"In order to test your affection, she invent-

ed the story of her loneliness, fearing that if you knew her as Lady Vivian, you might propose to her for her position.

"When you asked her to marry you, she felt that a refusal would lose you to her.

"You have learned, sir, that Lady Vivian looks upon human beings as playthings made to gratify her caprices.

"She resolved to be married under the name she had assumed, saying that, when the honeymoon was over, what fun it would be to take you to Oaklands, and see your face when you learned that she was its mistress, though she might remain so only for a short time.

"But will not Mr. Adair be angry at the deception?" I remonstrated.

"He loves me too well not to forgive anything I may say or do," she replied confidently.

"Of course my lady had her way; but scarcely was your honeymoon on the wane ere she tired of the lodgings, the sea-side, and of you.

"Susannah, we go back to Oaklands tomorrow morning," she said, as I was undressing her one evening.

"Have you told Mr. Adair?" I asked.

"No; we go alone," she said, to my great surprise. "I will share Oaklands with no one."

"She then drew my head down to a level with her face, and whispered something in my ear.

"We returned to Oaklands, her marriage with you was kept a secret, and when your son was born he assumed the position of Lord Vivian and heir to the estate.

"And now, sir," she went on, "let me give you my humble, but I think useful, advice. It is to let things take their own course. Even if you could prove your first marriage, it would benefit no one, and would bring a great sorrow upon the kind and amiable young lady I saw with you in church to-day."

Richard was silent. He felt how truly the woman spoke.

"I return to Oaklands this afternoon," she resumed; "but only for short time; then I shall settle in that home which your generosity will have helped to purchase."

"Generosity! You mean fear!" Adair exclaimed.

"Call it by what name you choose, sir," Susannah said, unmoved; "but rest assured that, from my lips, Miss May shall never know that Lady Vivian is your wife, nor that her boy is your son!"

"Oh, my love! my love! why have you so deceived me?" a voice behind them sobbed.

May, thinking to find Richard alone, had entered the room unperceived, and heard sufficient to know that he, whom she had believed to be her husband, was married to another woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

DE MORTE.

Of what need to dwell on May's anguish, on her father's indignation, and Richard's self-reproach?

This last was so bitter that he had not heart to exculpate himself even to the extent which he might have claimed, and to say, "I did evil, but it was in order that good to others might come of it."

The day after the return of father and daughter to Rockenhurst May received a letter from Adair, setting forth, without comment, all his unhappy story, and begging her to try first to forgive and then to forget him.

She took the letter to her room, without communicating its contents to any one.

At the usual dinner-hour, as she did not make her appearance, her father went in search of her.

He knocked at her door; but, as no reply came, he opened it. A damp chill seemed to rush forward to meet him.

"May! May!" he called.

Still there was no answer.

Thinking to find a light in her room, he had not brought one with him.

Outside the rain was pouring in torrents, and its damp breath, and the sound of its continuous dripping, seemed as though it were falling in the room.

The window formed a pale square of light against the leaden, fog-laden atmosphere.

"May!" he again cried, as a mortal inquietude seized him.

He groped his way to the window, and his hand rested on a woman's head.

"Bring lights quickly!" he shouted.

May was insensible, her head resting on her desk. The window before which it was placed she had opened, as though seeking by the keen air to prevent the agony she was suffering from choking her.

The fingers of her right hand held a pen; on the floor lay Richard's letter, and her face rested on the reply she was inditing to it, so that her lips touched the words, "My dear Richard, I do forgive you—"

She had written no further than this, and some drops of rain had splashed from the window-sill upon the paper. They looked like human tears.

"May, 'tis I—your father! Speak to me!"

She slowly opened her eyes, and tried to raise her head; but it fell back, as though unequal to the task of bearing the load of grief which had fallen upon it.

Then a fit of coughing seized her, and seemed as if, in its fury, it would tear her slight frame to pieces.

At her father's orders the servant lit a fire, and placed her in bed as quickly as possible; but fever had again taken possession of her, and she fell back into a similar state of delirium to that from which she had so recently recovered.

Her thoughts never seemed to depart from the letter she had received from him she had called husband for so short a period; and she continuously repeated sentences from it, and the words of her reply, "My dear Richard, I do forgive you." But to what she had written she added the words, "Come to me."

"Shall we save her?" Doctor Prendergast asked, in an agony of anxiety, of the medical *confrere* whom he had called in to confer with upon his daughter's state.

"It depends as much upon restoring peace to her mind as ease to her body," was the reply.

"Then she is lost to me!" exclaimed the heart-broken father.

"Do not say that. Let us begin by summoning the person she continually asks for," suggested the other.

Doctor Prendergast shook his head mournfully.

"It is impossible," he said.

"Then I despair of saving her."

"Dear Richard, I do forgive you! Come!"

The words came in imploring accents from the lips of the patient.

"You hear?" said the medical adviser.

Although Doctor Prendergast's indignation had been considerably mollified by the perusal of Richard's letter, still to again bring his daughter into contact with the man who had destroyed her happiness was a galling step; and only the knowledge that the life of his much-loved and only child was at stake eventually induced him to send the necessary summons.

Immediately upon receipt of the telegram from the doctor, Richard Adair started for Rockenhurst.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RIGHT OF FLOTSAM.

THERE was intense excitement at Rockenhurst the evening of Richard Adair's arrival.

It had been a season of heavy and continuous rains, and all the low-lying country was more or less flooded.

About a mile beyond the town, and within

half that distance of Oaklands, was a reservoir which supplied the neighborhood with water, and the embankment around it had for the previous four-and-twenty hours been showing cracks, through which the water had begun to ooze.

The ominous fissures were anxiously watched by the company's engineers, and gangs of workmen were employed under their direction in strengthening the banks which inclosed the huge mass of water, and doing all that human power could do to avert a catastrophe.

Doctor Prendergast's house stood on one of the highest parts of the town, and from it could be seen the grounds of Oaklands, which lay in a valley between it and the reservoir.

It was about six o'clock. The sky, charged with rain, had a russet tint, which feebly lighted the road along which Richard Adair was making his way, with feverish haste, to the bedside of her whom he had loved, and still did love, so well; when suddenly a terrible sound, loud as the report of a cannon, rent the air, and arrested his steps.

A dead silence, as if the explosion had stunned every thing in its vicinity, followed—a silence which, however, lasted but a moment, and then came a murmur like the rushing of distant waters.

This sound grew momentarily nearer, and became mingled with a series of crashes and the cries of human beings.

Then Richard beheld a crowd of people swarming up to the light on which he stood, and, following them, a twisting, glistening something, which, in the dim light, looked like a gigantic serpent.

The water had broken its boundaries, and had poured down with the force of an avalanche into the valley where stood the mansion of Oaklands.

By one of those strange oversights which so often accompany great disasters, its inhabitants had not been warned of their danger.

Like one seeking death, he ran as rapidly toward the fast-filling valley as an upward-pressing crowd would allow him.

The rain-clouds had passed away, and the moon illuminated the scene, tinging with silver the destructive waters which bore along the ruins they created, even as conquerors of old led in their triumphant van the spoils and prisoners they had made.

All around, trees were being torn up by the roots and outbuildings undermined, but the grand old mansion stood proud and defiant, the lights shining from its windows as though it were some light-house planted amid that angry flood.

But although it could not destroy, the torrent seemed resolved upon wreaking some of its vengeance upon the building, and, ere long, succeeded in breaking in the doors and windows on the lower floors, and washing away the greater part of their contents.

On the roof, pale as specters in the moonlight, Adair can see a number of persons making signals of distress, and strains his eyes in hopes of catching sight of his wife and child, but in vain.

He skirts the very edge of the water, and past him float the *debris* of the partially-wrecked house. Now it is some article of furniture, now a bird-cage, within which the little songster lies drowned, and now a dog vainly struggling to gain the banks.

So close to him that he can almost touch it passes the picture of Lady Vivian and her son. He makes no effort to save the fatal thing that seems to have exercised some baleful spell upon his life, and the calm, smiling faces drift away to destruction.

But now he sees something which he feels he must save, even at the cost of his own life.

He runs along in advance of the approaching object, and plunges into the flood at so well-calculated a distance that the waters almost deposit the son in his father's arms.

The boy is insensible; but there is a convulsive movement of the limbs, which tells that he is still alive.

Adair strikes out for the bank, and soon is in sufficiently shallow water to wade the remainder of the distance.

Suddenly a feeling of horror thrills through him. He finds that he cannot move.

He has stepped into a ditch, which the flood conceals.

The bottom is of clay, which clings to his feet, as though they were imbedded in glue—a soft glue which gives way under him, and into which he feels himself sinking.

Were he alone, he might, perhaps, release himself; but the weight of the boy causes him to sink deeper and deeper.

It is as though he were caught in a quicksand, from which, if he would escape, he must lighten himself, as does a ship in distress, and throw all he carries overboard.

At each effort he but sinks deeper.

Yes; he is surely foundering, for the water which a few moments since reached but to his knees is now at his waist.

He shouts for help; but the rush of the waters drowns his cries almost as soon as they leave his lips.

The water reaches his armpits.

He holds his boy above his head, and prepares to put forth all his strength for a final effort.

If he fails, it is death, for the waters will enter his mouth.

A cloud has passed over the moon; but he can see the drooping form and livid face which he poises above his head.

His effort is successful. He manages to wrench from the clay his hinder foot; and, in advancing it, it strikes against a boulder, on which he firmly places it.

He does the same with the other foot, and is saved, for a series of stones have been placed as a pathway across the ditch.

On reaching the bank he falls down from sheer exhaustion.

And, before raising himself, he has offered up his thanks for the restoration of his son—the son who is now his very own—the son whom he has snatched from the jaws of death.

He had no hesitation in carrying his insensible burden to Doctor Prendergast's abode.

The doctor knew now his miserable story, and would have pity on him. Moreover, the boy whom he was conveying to him for succor was the son of his old friend, Lady Vivian.

With the exception of the nurse, who was watching by May's bedside, all the household, ignorant of the catastrophe which had occurred, had retired to rest, and it was the doctor himself who admitted them.

He, too, it was who prepared and placed the boy in a hot bath, and used the necessary restoratives for bringing him back to life, and with such success, that soon the lad was sleeping peacefully in the doctor's own bed.

Doctor Prendergast was not a man to remain idle when he had a chance of benefiting his fellow-creatures; so no sooner was he assured of the boy's safety, and had provided Adair with a change of clothing, than he sallied forth to the scene of the disaster, and the pair spent the night in rendering what assistance they could, in conjunction with the other doctor of the town, who had arrived before them.

CHAPTER XV.

RESCUED.

THE escutcheon of the Vivian family hangs outside the mansion of Oaklands. A hearse, drawn by horses caparisoned with velvet trappings and nodding plumes, stands on the broad carriage drive; a coffin covered by a velvet pall, on which are heaped wreaths and crosses of "immortelles" and white flowers (shivering, poor exotics, in the cold November blast), borne adown the broad steps which the flood has left uninjured, by pall-bearers selected from some of the most ancient families in the county; a bell whose iron throat thuds forth

the notice that dust is being consigned to dust, all tell that Death is holding carnival.

He has conquered Mammon, the bier is his triumphal car, and all the funeral accompaniments are the slaves and spoil which he has summoned to follow in his wake.

On the subsiding of the flood, the body of Lady Vivian, the proud mistress of Oaklands, had been discovered near to the spot where her husband had rescued their son.

Close to the mistress lay the corpse of the maid, in whose possession was found the deeds relating to the cottage and ground, to obtain which she had sacrificed so much.

King Mammon had not been powerful enough to protect his subjects from King Death.

Half hidden by the trunk of a gigantic elm, whose overlaid branches, as the wind, singing a requiem, passed through them, discharged from time to time their burden of snow, stood a young man watching the procession as it filed silently along, looking against the white shroud, with which nature had draped the church-yard, like some lugubrious phantasmagoria.

Few, if any, of those who had been bidden to the sad ceremony felt more real emotion than did Richard Adair, for his love was, perhaps, the only genuine one which Lady Vivian's egotistical nature had extorted during her butterfly life.

That this love had passed away, destroyed by her who had engendered it, did not prevent his recalling, with mournful pity, the bright young creature he had met by the golden-crested waves, and whose wayward ways had exercised a charm for him; or the handsome and more matured woman, flashing with gold and jewels, who had appeared before him as the personification of wealth.

In hideous contrast stood out the pale, water-sodden features he had seen withdrawn from the muddy stream, and the wrongs he had suffered at her hands were forgotten, and naught but forgiveness reigned in his heart.

When all the mourners had departed, Richard approached the open grave, and strewed some flowers upon the bier.

"Though her sins had been as scarlet, they could be made white as wool," was his rejoicing thought.

The prediction of the medical man whom Doctor Prendergast had consulted respecting May proved correct; for from the moment of hearing her lover's voice her state improved, and on returning to consciousness, all the time intervening between her two illnesses seemed to have disappeared from her mind, and the events which had occurred in it to have been as it were a dream.

A vessel is steaming down the river bound for Canada, on such a delicious early summer morn as that on which this tale opened.

On the deck stands a group of four persons, consisting of May, her husband (she and Adair are now united "until death doth them part"), Doctor Prendergast, and the lad who had hitherto been known as Lord Vivian.

This last is clad in deep mourning, for his dead mother; but around his neck is twined the arm of a second and as loving a one.

The day after his recovery from the flood, his father had taken him away from Rockenhurst, and, in order that the estate might revert to its rightful owner without tarnishing the name of the woman he had once so loved, the belief that the young lord had perished on that fatal night was not contradicted.

"The King is dead, live the King!" had been cried, for the hated cousin now reigned over Oaklands.

Not only had the father rescued the son from death, but had snatched him from "Mammon's sway."

Lady Vivian had truly heaped up riches, not knowing who should gather them.

THE END.

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